Death on Television

The Best of Henry Slesar's Alfred Hitchcock Stories

Edited by Francis M. Nevins, Jr. and Martin H. Greenberg

Old Sadie Grimes had put her house up for sale five years ago, right after her son died. Although she was asking seventy-five thousand dollars for property worth ten, an out-of-towner now seemed determined to buy her home. He visited Sadie to persuade her to take less. She wouldn't budge and the stranger agreed to her price. Sadie served the lemonade and told him about the house.

Her son had hidden stolen cash somewhere in the house before his partner killed him while trying to recover it. She knew the killer world return and want the house. . .at any price. "All I had to do was wait until I found the man willing to pay much too much for an old lady's house," she said as the stranger's head began to spin from the lemonade.

Henry Slesar wrote "The Right Kind of House" and more than 40 other stories chosen for the classic television show, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents.*

Irony, not suspense, is the key ingredient in the nineteen stories by Slesar offered in this collection edited by Francis M. Nevins, Jr. and Martin H. Greenberg. Irony often seems a by-product of cynicism. Anatole France called it "the last phase of disillusion." For Hitchcock and his writers, irony, not just suspense, was the basis of their storytelling, along with its two constant companions: humor and pity.

Hitchcock first spotted Slesar's work in Ellery Queens Mystery Magazine. The story, entitled "M Is for the Many," became an episode called "Heart of Gold." A lonely, orphaned young man just out of prison calls on the family of his cellmate. They "adopt" him and he is happy for the first time in his life—until he learns that their kindness is directed toward finding out where his cellmate hid the money he stole. Once again, irony and pity combine for the dominant theme.

An attitude that smiled, sometimes a bit sadly, on the frailties of the human personality dictated which stories Hitchcock chose for his program. The story always came before sensationalism, humor before fright, in Hitchcock's presentations.

In his introduction Henry Slesar says:

"Hitchcock always appreciated a good joke. He also appreciated a good story. I have never needed a more gratifying commendation than the fact that he liked the ones in this book."

Francis M. Nevins, Jr., Professor at the St. Louis University School of Law, received the Mystery Writers of America Edgar Allan Poe Award for Criticism. He has also written about forty short stories which have appeared in Ellery Queen, Alfred Hitchcock and other national magazines and many of which have been reprinted in leading mystery anthologies.

Martin H. Greenberg, on the faculty of the College of Community Services at the University of Wisconsin, Green Bay, has been the editor or author of more than 100 books.

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Death on Television

The Best of Henry Slesar's

Alfred Hitchcock Stories

Edited by Francis M. Nevins, Jr
& Martin H. Greenberg
Introduction by Henry Slesar

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For Manuela

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Introduction

HENRY SLESAR

Quick. Fill in the following phrase. “Alfred Hitchcock, Master of—” Did you choose the word “Suspense”? So would most of the biographers, journalists, and drama pundits who have written, and will continue to write, about Hitchcock’s extraordinary career in movies and television. There’s only one thing wrong. When describing his classic TV series (which has actually been seen more often, by more people around the world, than all of Hitchcock’s feature films) the word just isn’t accurate enough, particularly when applied to the half-hour show called “Alfred Hitchcock Presents.” What Alfred Hitchcock presented, week after week, should have earn him another title: “Master of Irony.”

Don’t get me wrong. I don’t discredit the value of suspense. But suspense is a vital ingredient in all dramatic works, not just thrillers. It was the key ingredient in virtually all the fifty-three movies produced under the Hitchcock banner, and, to a lesser extent, was the driving force behind “The Alfred Hitchcock Hour,” which concluded his television career. But the steam engine that drove “Alfred Hitchcock Presents” could definitely be called an Irony Horse.

Famous example. A woman kills her husband with a blunt instrument. When the police investigators stay for dinner, she serves it to them: a frozen leg of lamb, now thawed and cooked. You probably recognized the Roald Dahl story, “Lamb to the Slaughter.” It has always been a source of chagrin to me. I’ve supplied more stories and scripts to the Hitchcock show than any other writer, but most people seem thoroughly unimpressed when they learn that I didn’t write this one. I which I had. It’s the quintessential “Alfred Hitchcock Presents,” because it’s 100 percent pure irony.

For some people, irony may seem like a by-product of cynicism. Anatole France called it “the last phase of disillusion.” But for Hitchcock, and those of us entrusted with creating the material of his show, irony was the key ingredient of our storytelling, along with its two constant components: humor and pity.

Let’s face it. There’s nothing intrinsically funny about crime. Remove the ironic overtones of “Lamb to the Slaughter” and you’re left with images of ugly human behavior, bestial rage, a crushed skull, a bloodstained kitchen floor. Hitchcock was only too aware of that possibility when he

decided to translate his genius to the small screen. He made a conscious decision to put the story before the gory. He chose delight over fright. He chose—I promise this is the last rhyme—the witty over the gritty. He must have made the right choice. "Alfred Hitchcock Presents" became television's longest running anthology series (when you add in its apparently immortal life in syndication). It is also a staple of virtually every country in the world capable of producing a television signal. It has earned its designation: classic.

Irony, humor, pity. They must have been important colors on my own palette when I started to write short stories. Hitchcock first spotted one of them in the pages of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. The story, with the ironic title of "M is for the Many," became an episode called "Heart of Gold," in which a lonely, orphaned young man just out of prison calls on the family of his cellmate and is promptly adopted by a loving mother and brother. He is happy for the first time in his life—until he learns that all their kindness is directed toward finding out where his cellmate hid the money he stole. Dominant theme? Irony and pity.

A number of irony-pity stories followed, until I started a new string. From *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, a favorite source of material, Hitchcock plucked an episode called "The Right Price."

A husband, interrupting a burglar (played by the pixiesh Eddie Foy, Jr.), offers him a proposition: kill his wife for a fee. They haggle about the price, and he agrees. But when the husband goes upstairs to view the burglar's handiwork, he is bludgeoned to death. His wife has outbid him. Irony and humor. Gallows humor, to be sure, but it went with the territory.

I was fortunate to have more than forty published stories chosen by Hitchcock—or to be more precise, approved by him after his admirable staff of producers, Joan Harrison, Norman Lloyd, and Gordon Hessler, made the original selection. There were few of these stories that didn't have a strong strain of irony. But let me repeat myself. It wasn't merely a cynical outlook on life that dictated the Hitchcock choices. It was an attitude that smiled, sometimes sadly, upon the frailties of the human personality. It was more than just a "sense of humor." The taste for irony, in the words of Jessamyn West, "has kept more hearts from breaking than a sense of humor—for it takes irony to appreciate the joke which is on oneself."

Hitchcock always appreciated a good joke. He also appreciated a good story. I have never needed a more gratifying commendation than the fact that he liked the ones in this book.

Night of The Execution

(published title: “The Day of the Execution”)

Aired: December 29, 1957

Teleplay by Bernard C. Schoenfeld

Starring: Pat Hingle

When the jury foreman stood up and read the verdict, Warren Selvey, the prosecuting attorney, listened to the pronouncement of guilt as if the words were a personal citation of merit. He heard in the foreman’s somber tones, not a condemnation of the accused man who shriveled like a burnt match on the courtroom chair, but a tribute to Selvey’s own brilliance. “*Guilty as charged!*” No, Warren Selvey thought triumphantly, guilty as I’ve proved.

For a moment, the judge’s melancholy eye caught Selvey’s and the old man on the bench showed shock at the light of rejoicing that he saw there. But Selvey couldn’t conceal his flush of happiness, his satisfaction with his own efforts, with his first major conviction.

He gathered up his documents briskly, fighting to keep his mouth appropriately grim, though it ached to smile all over his thin, brown face. He put his briefcase beneath his arm, and when he turned, faced the buzzing spectators. “Excuse me,” he said soberly, and pushed his way through the exit doors, thinking now only of Doreen.

He tried to visualize her face, tried to see the red mouth that could be hard or meltingly soft, depending on which one of her many moods happened to be dominant. He tried to imagine how she would look when she heard his good news, how her warm body would feel against his, how her arms would encompass him.

But this imagined foretaste of Doreen’s delights was interrupted. There were men’s eyes seeking his now, and men’s hands reaching toward him to grip his hand in congratulation. Garson, the district attorney, smiling heavily and nodding his lion’s head in approval of his cub’s behavior. Vance, the assistant D.A., grinning with half a mouth, not altogether pleased to see his junior in the spotlight. Reporters, too, and photographers, asking for statements, requesting poses.

Once, all this would have been enough for Warren Selvey. This moment, and these admiring men. But now there was Doreen, too, and

thought of her made him eager to leave the arena of his victory for a quieter, more satisfying reward.

But he didn't make good his escape. Garson caught his arm and steered him into the gray car that waited at the curb.

"How's it feel?" Garson grinned, thumping Selvey's knee as they drove off.

"Feels pretty good," Selvey said mildly, trying for the appearance of modesty. "But, hell, I can't take all the glory. Gar. Your boys made the conviction."

"You don't really mean that." Garson's eyes twinkled. "I watched you through the trial, Warren. You were tasting blood. You were an avenging sword. You put him on the waiting list for the chair, not me.

"Don't say that!" Selvey said sharply. "He was guilty as sin, and you know it. Why, the evidence was clear-cut. The jury did the only thing it could."

"That's right. The way you handled things, they did the only thing they could. But let's face it, Warren. With another prosecutor, maybe they would have done something else. Credit where credit's due, Warren."

Selvey couldn't hold back the smile any longer. It illumined his long, sharp-chinned face, and he felt the relief of having it relax his features. He leaned back against the thick cushion of the car.

"Maybe so," he said. "But I though he was guilty, and I tried to convince everybody else. It's not just A-B-C evidence that counts. Gar. That's law school sophistry, you know that. Sometimes you just feel!"

"Sure." The D.A. looked out of the window. "How's the bride, Warren?"

"Oh, Doreen's fine."

"Glad to hear it. Lovely woman, Doreen."

She was lying on the couch when he entered the apartment. He hadn't imagined this detail of his triumphant homecoming.

He came over to her and she shifted slightly on the couch to let his arms surround her.

He said: "Did you hear, Doreen? Did you hear what happened?"

"I heard it on the radio."

"Well? Don't you know what it means? I've got my conviction. My first conviction, and a big one. I'm no junior anymore, Doreen."

"What will they do to that man?"

He blinked at her, tried to determine what her mood might be. "I asked for the death penalty," he said. "He killed his wife in cold blood. Why should he get anything else?"

"I just asked, Warren." She put her cheek against his shoulder.

"Death is part of the job," he said. "You know that as well as I do, Doreen. You're not holding that against me?"

She pushed him away for a moment, appeared to be deciding whether to be angry or not. Then she drew him quickly to her, her breath hot and rapid in his ear.

They embarked on a week of celebration. Quiet, intimate celebration, in dim supper clubs and with close acquaintances. It wouldn't do for Selvey to appear publicly gay under the circumstances.

On the evening of the day the convicted Murray Rodman was sentenced to death, they stayed at home and drank hand-warmed brandy from big glasses. Doreen got drunk and playfully passionate, and Selvey thought he could never be happier. He had parlayed a mediocre law school record and an appointment as a third-class member of the state legal department into a position of importance and respect. He had married a beautiful, pampered woman and could make her whimper in his arms. He was proud of himself. He was grateful for the opportunity Murray Rodman had given him.

It was on the day of Rodman's scheduled execution that Selvey was approached by the stooped, gray-haired man with the grease-spotted hat.

He stepped out of the doorway of a drugstore, his hands shoved into the pockets of his dirty tweed overcoat, his hat low over his eyes. He had white stubble on his face.

"Please," he said. "Can I talk to you a minute?"

Selvey looked him over, and put a hand in his pocket for change.

"No," the man said quickly. "I don't want a handout. I just want to talk to you, Mr. Selvey."

"You know who I am?"

"Yeah, sure, Mr. Selvey. I read all about you."

Selvey's hard glance softened. "Well, I'm kind of rushed right now. Got an appointment."

"This is important, Mr. Selvey. Honest to God. Can't we go someplace? Have coffee maybe? Five minutes is all."

“Why don’t you drop me a letter, or come down to the office? We’re on Chambers Street—”

“It’s about this man, Mr. Selvey. The one they’re executing tonight.”

The attorney examined the man’s eyes. He saw how intent and penetrating they were.

“All right,” he said. “There’s a coffee shop down the street. But only five minutes, mind you.”

It was almost two-thirty; the lunchtime rush at the coffee shop was over. They found a booth in the rear, and sat silently while a waiter cleared the remnants of a hasty meal from the table.

Finally, the old man leaned forward and said: “My name’s Arlington, Phil Arlington. I’ve been out of town, in Florida, else I wouldn’t have let things go this far. I didn’t see a paper, hear a radio, nothing like that.”

“I don’t get you, Mr. Arlington. Are you talking about the Rodman trial?”

“Yeah, the Rodman business. When I came back and heard what happened, I didn’t know what to do. You can see that, can’t you? It hurt me, hurt me bad to read what was happening to that poor man. But I was afraid. You can understand that. I was afraid.”

“Afraid of what?”

The man talked to his coffee. “I had an awful time with myself, trying to decide what to do. But then I figured—hell, this Rodman is a young man. What is he, thirty-eight? I’m sixty-four, Mr. Selvey. Which is better?”

“Better for what?” Selvey was getting annoyed; he shot a look at his watch. “Talk sense, Mr. Arlington. I’m a busy man.”

“I thought I’d ask your advice.” The gray-haired man licked his lips. “I was afraid to go to the police right off, I thought I should ask you. Should I tell them what I did, Mr. Selvey? Should I tell them I killed that woman? Tell me. Should I?”

The world suddenly shifted on its axis. Warren Selvey’s hands grew cold around the coffee cup. He stared at the man across from him.

“What are you talking about?” he said. “Rodman killed his wife. We proved that.”

“No, no, that’s the point, I was hitchhiking east. I got a lift into Wilford. I was walking around town, trying to figure out where to get food, a job,

anything. I knocked on this door. This nice lady answered. She didn't have no job, but she gave me a sandwich. It was a ham sandwich."

"What house? How do you know it was Mrs. Rodman's House?"

"I know it was. I seen her picture, in the newspapers. She was a nice lady. If she hadn't walked into that kitchen after, it would have been okay."

"What, what?" Selvey snapped.

"I shouldn't have done it. I mean, she was real nice to me, but I was so broke. I was looking around the jars in the cupboard. You know how women are; they're always hiding dough in the jars, house money they call it. She caught me at it and got mad. She didn't yell or anything, but I could see she meant trouble. That's when I did it, Mr. Selvey. I went off my head."

"I don't believe you," Selvey said. "Nobody saw any—anybody in the neighborhood. Rodman and his wife quarreled all the time—"

The gray-haired man shrugged. "I wouldn't know anything about that, Mr. Selvey. I don't know anything about those people. But that's what happened, and that's why I want your advice." He rubbed his forehead. "I mean, if I confess now, what would they do to me?"

"Burn you," Selvey said coldly. "Burn you instead of Rodman. Is that what you want?"

Arlington paled. "No. Prison, okay. But not that."

"Then just forget about it. Understand me. Mr. Arlington? I think you dreamed the whole thing, don't you? Just think of it that way. A bad dream. Now get back on the road and forget it."

"But that man. They're killing him tonight—"

"Because he's guilty." Selvey's palm hit the table. "I proved him guilty. Understand?"

The man's lip trembled.

"Yes, sir," he said.

Selvey got up and tossed a five on the table. "Pay the bill," he said curtly. "Keep the change."

That night, Doreen asked him the hour for the fourth time.

"Eleven," he said sullenly.

"Just another hour." She sank deep into the sofa cushions. "I wonder how he feels right now."

"Cut it out!"

“My, we’re jumpy tonight.”

“My part’s done with, Doreen. I told you that again and again. Now the State’s doing its job.”

She held the tip of her pink tongue between her teeth thoughtfully. “But you put him where he is, Warren. You can’t deny that.”

“The jury put him there!”

“You don’t have to shout at me, attorney.”

“Oh, Doreen. . .” He leaned across to make some apologetic gesture, but the telephone rang.

He picked it up angrily.

“Mr. Selvey? This is Arlington.”

All over Selvey’s body, a pulse throbbed.

“What do you want?”

“Mr. Selvey, I been thinking it over. What you told me today. Only I don’t think it would be right, just forgetting about it. I mean—”

“Arlington, listen to me. I’d like to see you at my apartment. I’d like to see you right now.”

From the sofa, Doreen said: “Hey!”

“Did you hear me, Arlington? Before you do anything rash, I want to talk to you, tell you where you stand legally. I think you owe that to yourself.”

There was a pause at the other end.

“Guess maybe you’re right, Mr. Selvey. Only I’m way downtown, and by the time I get there—”

“You can make it. Take the IRT subway, it’s quickest. Get off at 86th Street.”

When he hung up, Doreen was standing.

“Doreen, wait. I’m sorry about this. This man is—an important witness in a case I’m handling. The only time I can see him is now.”

“Have fun,” she said airily, and went to the bedroom.

“Doreen—”

The door closed behind her. For a moment, there was silence. Then she clicked the lock.

Selvey cursed his wife’s moods beneath his breath, and stalked over to the bar.

By the time Arlington sounded the door chimes, Selvey had downed six inches of bourbon.

Arlington's grease-spotted hat and dirty coat looked worse than ever in the plush apartment. He took them off and looked around timidly.

"We've only got three-quarters of an hour," he said. "I've just got to do something, Mr. Selvey."

"I know what you can do," the attorney smiled. "You can have a drink and talk things over."

"I don't think I should—" But the man's eyes were already fixed on the bottle in Selvey's hands. The lawyer's smile widened.

By eleven-thirty, Arlington's voice was thick and blurred, his eyes no longer so intense, his concern over Rodman no longer so compelling.

Selvey kept his visitor's glass filled.

The old man began to mutter. He muttered about his childhood, about some past respectability, and inveighed against a string of strangers who had done him dirt. After awhile, his shaggy head began to roll on his shoulders, and his heavy-lidded eyes began to close.

He was jarred out of his doze by the mantel clock's chiming.

"Whazzat?"

"Only the clock," Selvey grinned.

"Clock? What time? What time?"

"Twelve, Mr. Arlington. Your worries are over. Mr. Rodman's already paid for his crime."

"No!" The old man stood up, circling wildly. "No, that's not true. I killed that woman. Not him! They can't kill him for something he—"

"Relax, Mr. Arlington. Nothing you can do about it now."

"Yes, yes! Must tell them—the police—"

"But why! Rodman's been executed. As soon as that clock struck, he was dead. What good can you do him now?"

"Have to!" the old man sobbed. "Don't you see? Couldn't live with myself, Mr. Selvey. Please—"

He tottered over to the telephone. Swiftly the attorney put his hand on the receiver.

"Don't," he said.

Their hands fought for the instrument, and the younger man's won easily.

“You won’t stop me, Mr. Selvey. I’ll go down there myself. I’ll tell them all about it. And I’ll tell them about you—”

He staggered toward the door. Selvey’s arm went out and spun him around.

“You crazy old tramp! You’re just asking for trouble. Rodman’s dead —”

“I don’t care!”

Selvey’s arm lashed out and his hand cracked across the sagging, white-whiskered face. The old man sobbed at the blow, but persisted in his attempt to reach the door. Selvey’s anger increased and he struck out again, and after the blow, his hands dropped to the old man’s scrawny neck. The next idea came naturally. There wasn’t much life throbbing in the old throat. A little pressure, and Selvey could stop the frantic breathing, the hoarse, scratchy voice, the damning words.

Selvey squeezed, harder and harder.

And then his hands let him go. The old man swayed and slid against Selvey’s body to the floor.

In the doorway, rigid, icy-eyed: Doreen.

“Doreen, listen—”

“You choked him,” she said.

“Self-defense!” Selvey shouted. “He broke in here, tried to rob the apartment.”

She slammed the door shut, twisted the inside lock. Selvey raced across the carpet and pounded desperately on the door. He rattled the knob and called her name, but there was no answer. Then he heard the sound of a spinning telephone dial.

It was bad enough, without having Vance in the crowd that jammed the apartment. Vance, the assistant D.A., who hated his guts anyway. Vance, who was smart enough to break down his burglar story without any trouble, who had learned that Selvey’s visitor had been expected. Vance, who would delight in his predicament.

But Vance didn’t seem delighted. He looked puzzled. He stared down at the dead body on the floor of Selvey’s apartment and said: “I don’t get it, Warren. I just don’t get it. What did you want to kill a harmless old guy like that for?”

“Harmless? *Harmless?*”

“Sure. Harmless. That’s old Arlington, I’d know him any place.”

“You know him?” Selvey was stunned.

“Sure, I met up with him when I was working out of Bellaire County. Crazy old guy goes around confessing to murders. But why kill him, Warren? What for?”

The Right Kind of House

(published title: "The Right Kind of a House")

Aired: March 9, 1958

Teleplay by Robert C. Dennis

Directed by Don Taylor

Starring: Robert Emhardt and Jeanette Nolan

The automobile that was stopping in front of Aaron Hacker's real estate office had a New York license plate. Aaron didn't need to see the white rectangle to know that its owner was new to the elm-shaded streets of Ivy Corners. It was a red convertible; there was nothing else like it in town.

The man got out of the car.

"Sally," Hacker said to the bored young lady at the only other desk. There was a paperbound book propped in her typewriter, and she was chewing something dreamily.

"Yes, Mr. Hacker?"

"Seems to be a customer. Think we oughta look busy?" He put the question mildly.

"Sure, Mr. Hacker!" She smiled brightly, removed the book, and slipped a blank sheet of paper into the machine. "What shall I type?"

"Anything, anything!" Aaron scowled.

It looked like a customer, all right. The man was heading straight for the glass door, and there was a folded newspaper in his right hand. Aaron described him later as heavy-set. Actually, he was fat. He wore a colorless suit of lightweight material, and the perspiration had soaked clean through the fabric to leave large, damp circles around his arms. He might have been fifty, but he had all his hair, and it was dark and curly. The skin of his face was flushed and hot, but the narrow eyes remained clear and frosty-cold.

He came through the doorway, glanced toward the rattling sound of the office typewriter, and then nodded at Aaron.

"Mr. Hacker?"

"Yes, sir," Aaron smiled. "What can I do for you?"

The fat man waved the newspaper. "I looked you up in the real estate section."

"Yep. Take an ad every week. I use the *Times*, too, now and then. Lot of city people interested in a town like ours. Mr.—"

"Waterbury," the man said. He plucked a white cloth out of his pocket and mopped his face. "Hot today."

"Unusually hot," Aaron answered. "Doesn't often get so hot in our town. Mean temperature's around seventy-eight in the summer. We got the lake, you know. Isn't that right, Sally?" The girl was too absorbed to hear him. "Well. Won't you sit down, Mr. Waterbury?"

"Thank you." The fat man took the proffered chair, and sighed. "I've been driving around. Thought I'd look the place over before I came here. Nice little town."

"Yes, we like it. Cigar?" He opened a box on his desk.

"No, thank you. I really don't have much time, Mr. Hacker. Suppose we get right down to business."

"Suits me, Mr. Waterbury." He looked toward the clacking noise and frowned. "*Sally!*"

"Yes, Mr. Hacker?"

"Cut out the darn racket."

"Yes, Mr. Hacker." She put her hands in her lap, and stared at the meaningless jumble of letters she had drummed on the paper.

"Now, then," Aaron said. "Was there any place in particular you were interested in, Mr. Waterbury?"

"As a matter of fact, yes. There was a house at the edge of town, across the way from an old building. Don't know what kind of building—deserted."

"Ice-house," Aaron said. "Was it a house with pillars?"

"Yes. That's the place. Do you have it listed? I thought I saw a 'for sale' sign, but I wasn't sure."

Aaron shook his head, and chuckled dryly. "Yep, we got it listed all right." He flipped over a loose-leaf book, and pointed to a typewritten sheet. "You won't be interested for long."

"Why not?"

He turned the book around. "Read it for yourself."

The fat man did so.

AUTHENTIC COLONIAL. 8 rooms, two baths, automatic oil furnace, large porches, trees and shrubbery. Near shopping, schools. $175,000.

"Still interested?"

The man stirred uncomfortably. "Why not? Something wrong with it?"

“Well.” Aaron scratched his temple. “If you really like this town, Mr. Waterbury—I mean, if you really want to settle here, I got any number of places that’d suit you better.”

“Now, just a minute!” The fat man looked indignant. “What do you call this? I’m asking you about this colonial house. You want to sell it, or don’t you?”

“Do I?” Aaron chuckled. “Mister, I’ve had that property on my hands for five years. There’s nothing I’d rather collect a commission only my luck just ain’t that good.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, you won’t buy. That’s what I mean. I keep the listing on my books just for the sake of old Sadie Grimes. Otherwise, I wouldn’t waste the space. Believe me.”

“I don’t get you.”

“Then let me explain.” He took out a cigar, but just to roll it in his fingers. “Old Mrs. Grimes put her place up for sale five years ago, when her son died. She gave me the job of selling it. I didn’t want the job—no, sir. I told her that to her face. The old place just ain’t worth the kind of money she’s asking. I mean, heck! The old place ain’t even worth ten thousand!”

The fat man swallowed. “Fifty? And she wants one-seventy-five?”

“That’s right. Don’t ask me why. It’s a real old house. Oh, I don’t mean one of those solid-as-a-rock old houses. I mean *old.* Never been de-termited. Some of the beams will be going in the next couple of years. Basement’s full of water half the time. Upper floor leans to the right about nine inches. And the grounds are a mess.”

“Then why does she ask so much?”

Aaron shrugged. “Don’t ask me. Sentiment, maybe. Been in her family since the Revolution, something like that.”

The fat man studied the floor. “That’s too bad,” he said. “Too bad!” He looked up at Aaron, and smiled sheepishly. “And I kinda liked the place. It was—I don’t know how to explain it—the right kind of house.”

“I know what you mean. It’s a friendly old place. A good buy at fifty thousand. But one-seventy-five?” He laughed. “I think I know Sadie’s reasoning, though. You see, she doesn’t have much money. Her son was supporting her, doing well in the city. Then he died, and she knew that it was sensible to sell. But she couldn’t bring herself to part with the old

place. So she put a price tag so big that nobody would come near it. That eased her conscience." He shook his head sadly. "It's a strange world, ain't it?"

"Yes," Waterbury said distantly.

Then he stood up. "Tell you what, Mr. Hacker. Suppose I drive out to see Mrs. Grimes? Suppose I talk to her about it, get her to change her price."

"You're fooling yourself, Mr. Waterbury. I've been trying for five years."

"Who knows? Maybe if somebody else tried—"

Aaron Hacker spread his palms. "Who knows, is right. It's a strange world, Mr. Waterbury. If you're willing to go to the trouble. I'll be only too happy to lend a hand."

"Good. Then I'll leave now."

"Fine! You just let me ring Sadie Grimes. I'll tell her you're on your way."

Waterbury drove slowly through the quiet streets. The shade trees that lined the avenues cast peaceful dappled shadows on the hood of the convertible. The powerful motor beneath it operated in whispers, so he could hear the fitful chirpings of the birds overhead.

He reached the home of Sadie Grimes without once passing another moving vehicle. He parked his car beside the rotted picket fence that faced the house like a row of disorderly sentries.

The lawn was a jungle of weeds and crabgrass, and the columns that rose from the front porch were entwined with creepers.

There was a hand knocker on the door. He pumped it twice.

The woman who responded was short and plump. Her white hair was vaguely purple in spots, and the lines in her face descended downward toward her small, stubborn chin. She wore a heavy wool cardigan, despite the heat.

"You must be Mr. Waterbury," she said. "Aaron Hacker said you were coming."

"Yes." The fat man smiled. "How do you do, Mrs. Grimes?"

"Well as I can expect. I suppose you want to come in?"

"Awfully hot out here." He chuckled.

“Mm. Well, come in then. I’ve put some lemonade in the ice-box. Only don’t expect me to bargain with you, Mr. Waterbury. I’m not that kind of person.”

“Of course not,” the man said winningly, and followed her inside.

It was dark and cool. The window shades were opaque, and they had been drawn. They entered a square parlor with heavy, baroque furniture shoved unimaginatively against every wall. The only color in the room was in the faded hues of the tasseled rug that lay in the center of the bare floor.

The old woman headed straight for a rocker, and sat motionless, her wrinkled hands folded sternly.

“Well?” she said. “If you have anything to say, Mr. Waterbury, I suggest you say it.”

The fat man cleared his throat. “Mrs. Grimes, I’ve just spoken with your real estate agent—”

“I know all that,” she snapped. “Aaron’s a fool. All the more for letting you come here with the notion of changing my mind. I’m too old for changing my mind, Mr. Waterbury.”

“Er—well, I don’t know if that was my intention, Mrs. Grimes. I thought we’d just—talk a little.”

She leaned back, and the rocker groaned. “Talk’s free. Say what you like.”

“Yes.” He mopped his face again, and shoved the handkerchief only halfway back into his pocket. “Well, let me put it this way, Mrs. Grimes. I’m a businessman—a bachelor. I’ve worked for a long time, and I’ve made a fair amount of money. Now I’m ready to retire—preferably, somewhere quiet. I like Ivy Corners. I passed through here some years back, on my way to—er, Albany. I thought, one day, I might like to settle here.”

“So?”

“So, when I drove through your town today, and saw this house—I was enthused. It just seemed—right for me.”

“I like it too, Mr. Waterbury. That’s why I’m asking a fair price for it.”

Waterbury blinked. “Fair price? You’ll have to admit, Mrs. Grimes, these days a house like this shouldn’t cost more than—”

“That’s enough!” the old woman cried. “I told you, Mr. Waterbury—I don’t want to sit here all day and argue with you. If you won’t pay my price, then we can forget all about it.”

“But, Mrs. Grimes—”

“Good day, Mr. Waterbury!”

She stood up, indicating that he was expected to do the same.

But he didn’t. “Wait a moment, Mrs. Grimes,” he said, “just a moment. I know it’s crazy, but—all right. I’ll pay what you want.”

She looked at him for a long moment. “Are you sure, Mr. Waterbury?”

“Positive! I’ve enough money. If that’s the only way you’ll have it, that’s the way it’ll be.”

She smiled thinly. “I think that lemonade’ll be cold enough. I’ll bring you some—and then I’ll tell you something about this house.”

He was mopping his brow when she returned with the tray. He gulped at the frosty yellow beverage greedily.

“This house,” she said, easing back in her rocker, “has been in my family since eighteen hundred and two. It was built some fifteen years before that. Every member of the family, except my son, Michael, was born in the bedroom upstairs. I was the only rebel,” she added raffishly. “I had new-fangled ideas about hospitals.” Her eyes twinkled.

“I know it’s not the most solid house in Ivy Corners. After I brought Michael home, there was a flood in the basement, and we never seemed to get it dry since. Aaron tells me there are termites, too, but I’ve never seen the pesky things. I love the old place, though; you understand.”

“Of course,” Waterbury said.

“Michael’s father died when Michael was nine. It was hard times on us then. I did some needlework, and my own father had left me the small annuity which supports me today. Not in very grand style, but I manage. Michael missed his father, perhaps even more than I. He grew up to be—well, wild is the only word that comes to mind.”

The fat man clucked, sympathetically.

“When he graduated from high school, Michael left Ivy Corners and went to the city. Against my wishes, make no mistake. But he was like so many young men; full of ambition, undirected ambition. I don’t know what he did in the city. But he must have been successful—he sent me money regularly.” Her eyes clouded. “I didn’t see him for nine years.”

“And,” the man sighed, sadly.

“Yes, it wasn’t easy for me. But it was even worse when Michael came home because, when he did, he was in trouble.”

“Oh?”

“I didn’t know how bad the trouble was. He showed up in the middle of the night, looking thinner and older than I could have believed possible. He had no luggage with him, only a small black suitcase. When I tried to take it from him, he almost struck me. Struck me—his own mother!

“I put him to bed myself, as if he was a little boy again. I could hear him crying out during the night.

“The next day, he told me to leave the house. Just for a few hours—he wanted to do something, he said. He didn’t explain what. But when I returned that evening, I noticed that the little black suitcase was gone.”

The fat man’s eyes widened over the lemonade glass.

“What did it mean?” he asked.

“I didn’t know then. But I found out soon—too terribly soon. That night, a man came to our house. I don’t even know how he got in. I first knew when I heard voices in Michael’s room. I went to the door, and tried to listen, tried to find out what sort of trouble my boy was in. But I heard only shouts and threats, and then. . .”

She paused, and her shoulders sagged.

“And a shot,” she continued, “a gunshot. When I went into the room, I found the bedroom window open, and the stranger gone. And Michael—he was on the floor. He was dead.”

The chair creaked.

“That was five years ago,” she said. “Five long years. It was a while before I realized what had happened. The police told me the story. Michael and this other man had been involved in a crime, a serious crime. They had stolen many, many thousands of dollars.

“Michael had taken that money, and run off with it, wanting to keep it all for himself. He hid it somewhere in this house—to this very day I don’t know where. Then the other man came looking for my son, came to collect his share. When he found the money gone, he—he killed my boy.”

She looked up. “That’s when I put the house up for sale, at $175,000. I knew that, someday, my son’s killer would return. Someday, he would want this house at any price. All I had to do was wait until I found the man willing to pay much too much for an old lady’s house.”

She rocked gently.

Waterbury put down the empty glass and licked his lips, his eyes no longer focusing, his head rolling loosely on his shoulders.

"*Ugh!*" he said. "This lemonade is bitter."

One Grave Too Many

Aired: May 22, 1960

Teleplay by Henry Slesar

Directed by Arthur Hiller

Starring: Jeremy Slate

There was so much rage and frustration in Joe Helmer's mind that there was no room for ordinary reasoning. Ten minutes after he climbed aboard, he realized he had taken the wrong bus, wasted a precious dollar on a ride that took him ten blocks short of his destination. He cursed his stupidity aloud, and the swaying homegoing passengers beside him looked him over with dull, vacant eyes.

It was Irene's fault, of course. He had telephoned her from the movie house where he had spent the rainy afternoon, and all he got was a renewal of the argument they had at breakfast. She just don't understand the way it was with him, the way he felt inside when he saw grubby workmen sweating for their dough, or mousy guys with glasses behind cold metal desks, waiting for their weensy paycheck every Friday. He couldn't be like them, not Joe Helmer. It was better to be unemployed, to be patient, to wait for the real break. He knew it would happen; the right deal was just around the corner someplace; a smart guy had to wait. He couldn't just jump at anything.

Sure, things were getting rough. He thought they had their creditors stalled, stalled until he could land the right spot, and the right money. Then one morning, Irene had shrieked banshee-like at the dripping water in a refrigerator that wasn't getting electric power. Then there was silence in the diaphragm of the telephone.

Then there was the curt letter from the building management, talking about eviction. So Joe made the rounds, saying no to the cheap laborer's jobs they offered him, fuming at the cool reception he got from white collar personnel managers. In remembered anger, he glared at the well-dressed man jostling his elbow in the bus.

The bus squealed to a halt at 24th Street, last stop on the line. Still cursing, he followed the passengers into the dark street. He was broke; he'd have to walk home.

He found himself behind the well-dressed man, and hated the smooth drape of his fine-tailored suit. The man walked briskly; he was a stout, shortlegged man, close to sixty, but he walked with the spring of youth. That's what money can do for you, Joe thought.

The streets were empty in the downtown neighborhood. The man turned the corner at 21st Street, and Joe, who had to cut three blocks west anyway, turned with him. The sound of their dual footsteps were loud on the quiet street. Click, click, went the man's metal-tipped heels. Clomp, clomp, went Joe's run-down heels.

They walked two blocks together, single file, like a two man parade. Then, some twenty yards ahead of him, the man stopped.

Joe stopped too, curious as to the suddenness of his action. He saw the man clutching his arm, and then loosening his shirt collar in a desperate attempt to get air into his windpipe.

Joe walked closer and the man wheeled about. For a moment, he caught Joe's eyes and made a mute appeal for help. But there was nothing Joe could do for him; the man stumbled forward and fell in a clumsy heap on the sidewalk.

Joe stared, numbed by surprise. He knew the man was sick, maybe dead, but he didn't want to take part in the drama; he had his own troubles. He walked forward slowly, looking around at the unresponding brownstones that lined the avenue, hoping for signs of someone who would take the responsibility out of his hands.

But there was no one. He came to the side of the fallen man, and said, "Hey, mister. You okay?"

The question sounded inane even to his own ears. The man wasn't okay; his silence, the inertness of his body told the story. Joe reached down and gingerly lifted the plump wrist from the pavement, feeling for the pulse. He was awkward, uncertain, but he could not detect a beat. He put his hand over the man's open mouth, and the skin of his palm didn't warm up any breath.

He stood up, brushing his hands against his trousers, looking up and down the deserted street. Then he remembered to look in the man's coat for identifying papers.

He took the bulky wallet from the inside pocket. It sprung open in his hands, and he saw the bills.

How could he miss them? There were maybe twenty of them, thirty. They were nice-sized bills, fives and tens and twenties, and an occasional fifty. They added up. They added up nicely.

He stared so hard at the money in his hand that he forgot his original intention. All he could think about was the decision he had to make.

He looked down at the dead man. Natty was the word for him. A small mustache coursed under his nose. His open mouth was placid, and his eyes were closed. He looked peaceful. What good was his money now?

Joe Helmer, almost indifferently, slipped the wallet into his hip pocket. Then he walked backwards a few steps, watching the body. Finally, he turned and broke into a rapid stride that became a trot two blocks later. He didn't stop trotting until he was within sighting distance of the run-down apartment house where Irene waited, still nursing the wounds inflicted by their early-morning argument.

Then he walked, calmly, up the front stoop. He walked, slowly, up the three flights to their door. He entered, smiling, to see Irene soaking nylons in the kitchen washbasin.

"Well?" she said, turning to face him.

"Not much luck," he said, casually. He went to the refrigerator for a beer, and then remembered about the electricity. Frowning, he took a warm bottle from the shelf and brought it to the table. He uncapped it, and said: "Things are slow uptown; this recession's got everybody scared. But I ought to land something next week."

She came over to him, a woman surprisingly attractive for her hardships. She brushed a hand through short, uncurled hair, and her nostrils widened.

"What movie did you see?"

"Don't talk like that, Irene, I spent the whole day looking."

"I'll het."

"I tell you I looked. As a matter of fact, I had a little luck this afternoon. Ran into a guy I knew in the Army, and what do you think? He remembered about some dough he owed me. I got him out of a real jam once, and he remembered. Shows there are nice people in the world."

She looked suspicious. "Are you kidding?"

"Of course I'm not kidding. Want to see the money?"

“Sure,” she said, folding her thin arms. “Let’s see it. I don’t know if I’ll recognize the stuff, but let’s try.”

He grinned and reached into his hip pocket. He slipped out the thick wad of bills and fanned them on the table like a bridge hand. He got a kick out of seeing her eyes bug.

“For the love of mike!” Irene said. “How much is that, Joe?”

“Count it.”

She did, hurriedly, her eyes already making plans for spending it.

“Three hundred and seventy-five dollars!”

“Exactly what he owed me,” Joe said smugly, pleased with himself.

“This is wonderful! We can give Mr. Peterson fifty for the rent—he can wait for the March payment. And the grocer will take a hundred. And then we can call the electric and telephone company—”

“Hey, take it easy,” Joe chuckled. “Leave a couple of bucks for a steak dinner. We owe it to ourselves, huh?”

“Oh, Joe,” Irene said, going into his arms the way she did when they were first married, the way Joe liked her.

In the bedroom, alone, Joe opened the empty wallet.

There were two pockets, both with plastic windows. The first held a card that said: *Marvin Horine, 8 East 70th Street.*

But Joe stared at the second window without comprehending the strange words printed on the white card. He read them over twice before their meaning became clear.

I AM NOT DEAD

I am subject to a form a cataleptic illness which may appear to cause death. If I am found, notify at once Dr. Nelson Kruger, 441 East 64th Street, 525-0010.

He dropped the wallet on the bed as if discovering it contained some virulent plague germs. Then he stared at it, and felt the cold seep over his arms and legs, until he thought he was going to be sick himself. He pictured the face upturned on the pavement—the natty little mustache and the peaceful open mouth. Then he saw another picture in his brain, and the thought struck him with empathic horror. A hole in the earth, and a plain wooden box, and a shovel dumping dirt on the boards.

He sat on the bed and shut his eyes, creating a darkness he could think in. He thought and thought, but not with any logic or purpose. He got up

from the bed and saw his own face in the vanity mirror. It was white, bloodless; he hardly recognized it.

Then Joe stirred himself into action. He pocketed the wallet and went into the kitchen, pulling on his jacket. Irene was at the stove, humming to herself. She looked around when he came in and started to say something. He stopped her with:

"Irene, give me five bucks."

"What?"

"I need five bucks," he said sharply. "Don't ask me why."

"But I thought we talked it over. I thought we weren't going to touch that money, both of us. Not until all the bills were paid—"

"Irene, I need it. Don't argue with me!"

Her mouth pouted, but she went to the coffee tin on the shelf and brought it down. She rifled through the loose jumble of bills until she found the right denomination. He snatched it from her hand greedily, and then, as if feeling guilty, kissed her on the cheek.

"I really need it, honey," he said placatingly. "I'll tell you about it some other time, but I really need it. I'll be back in a little while."

He went to the door. "Joe," Irene said.

"It's all right, honey," Joe said, and moved rapidly down the stairs to the street.

He had a hard time running down a taxi; it wasn't a neighborhood for profitable cruising. Then he spotted one close to Broadway, and hurried across the street.

He gave the address, the spot where the man had fallen, the place where he had made his decision.

They reached it in less than five minutes in the light traffic. He hopped out of the cab at the intersection, not wanting to pull up at the exact site. He walked slowly, without evident purpose, around the corner.

He expected to find things different, and he did. But still he was shocked, shocked at the silence of the scene, at the absence of the body. There was a police car, its motor idling, some twenty yards from where the victim had been struck down. Otherwise—absolutely nothing.

He ambled toward the prowl car, not knowing what to say or how to begin saying it.

"Evening, officer."

The cop in the front seat looked at him, looked at his seedy clothes and inquiring face. Then he nodded back, noncommittally.

"Some excitement around here?" Joe said.

"Man dropped dead, that's all," the officer grunted. "They took him off a few minutes ago." His eyes went curious. "You know anything about it?"

"Who, me? Not a thing," Joe said, backing away. "Just heard the ambulance, that's all. Just curious."

He moved away, trying to walk nonchalantly and almost stumbling over his own feet. He didn't glance back until he reached the far corner, and by that time, the car had gunned its way to other problems.

Then Joe knew he could do no more. He had gone this far, but that was all he had in him. It was tough, it was too bad, it was the way the world was made. Maybe some smart medic at the police department would recognize the ailment, know the man wasn't really dead. Maybe he was all right, this Marvin Horine, 8 East 70th Street. Maybe he was sitting up right now, smoking and yakking it up.

Joe hailed another cab. It cost him another two dollars to make it back home. He walked in and took the remaining dollar from his pocket, and solemnly deposited it in the coffee tin as Irene watched. She didn't ask any questions.

Then he went to bed.

He woke up sweating so hard that the sheets were slippery. Beside him, Irene said, "Joe, Joe, what's the matter with you?"

"What is it? What time is it?"

"I don't know." She peered at the alarm clock on the night table. "Seven-thirty. You better get up."

He groaned, and put his face in the pillow. "Naw, I'm too tired. I didn't sleep so hot."

"You're not going to look today?"

"Sure, I'll look, I'll look. Gimme time."

"Then you ought to get started. You know it's best to get out early, Joe. The whole day goes before you know it."

He grunted.

"Joe, that money won't last us forever."

The mention of the money brought him fully awake. He sat up in the bed, and reached for a cigarette. He lit it, and smoked it down to half an

inch, thinking about last night. Then he got up and hurriedly dressed.

He put coffee in the percolator, and started the stove. He watched the brown liquid bubble in the glass cap as if hypnotized by the volatile motion.

Then he sat down at the kitchen table, and studied the wallpaper.

I'm a murderer, he thought.

He didn't call himself a thief. Everybody was some kind of thief, one way or another. It was all a matter of degree, the way Joe saw it.

But a murder—even by default—that was something else. That was a thought that made his stomach shrink, that made the sweat frost on his arms and neck. A voice out of his childhood, quoting scripture, talking fire and brimstone, came into his head. He felt weak, like a kid, and frightened.

He was letting the guy die, and for what? Three hundred and seventy-five bucks! When he compared it to his youthful dreams, to his plans for thousand-dollar deals, for big-time investments in real estate, lumber, steel companies, it seemed like nothing at all. Sure, the money came in handy now, if only to dam Irene's nagging voice. But what did it buy him? Another month in this ratty apartment? A lifetime of bad dreams and sweaty sheets?

He listened for the sound of Irene in the bedroom. She wasn't stirring; he could hear her deep, regular breathing.

Then he tiptoed downstairs.

Two blocks from the house, there was a drug store. He stepped into a phone booth, called the operator, and asked for the police department.

"Listen," he told the authoritative voice that answered. "That guy who dropped dead on 21st street last night—"

"One second," the voice interrupted. "Now what was that name?"

"What's the difference? The guy you found wasn't really dead. He only looked dead. He had some kind of sickness—"

"What are you, a funny guy?"

Joe rubbed his neck. "I'm serious," he said. "The guy had a kind of fit, that's all. But you shouldn't bury him. Understand? You shouldn't bury him —"

There was a pause, and then the voice said; too pleasantly:

"Tell you what, mac. Why don't you come down here and tell us all about it? All right?"

Joe looked at the receiver, and knew what the officer was thinking. The idea angered him; he cursed, and hung up savagely.

It was no use; they'd never believe an unidentified voice on the phone. There had to be another way.

Then he remembered. The doctor! The doctor Marvin Horine had listed in his wallet. Now what was his name? Joe pinched his forehead. Something with a K. Kramer? Klein? He smacked his fist against the wall of the booth, jarring his memory. Kruger, that was it!

He stepped outside and burrowed through the Manhattan directory until he found the number. Then he dialed it, and waited anxiously until the answer came.

"Dr. Kruger," the girl said.

"Let me speak to him," Joe told her. "It's urgent—"

"I'm sorry, Dr. Kruger's not available. If I could take a message—"

"Where is he? I have to talk to him!"

"He's on vacation. Miami, I think. If you'll give me your name—"

"Never mind that. Do you know anything about a patient named Marvin Horine?"

"I'm sorry, sir."

"But aren't you the nurse?" Joe asked.

"This is an answering service," the voice said.

Joe hung up.

There wasn't any alternative now. He could take his head in his hands and walk flat-footed into the police station. He could explain it to them in person, let them see that he wasn't a drunk or a crank. He could conceal his own part in the business, if he played it smart. But he had to convince them, had to make them know the truth before the shovel started piling dirt on the planks.

He walked out of the drug store, and headed slowly for the precinct house.

The sergeant at the front desk didn't even look up at him, until he said.

"I'm the one who telephoned, about the guy who dropped dead on 21st Street."

The officer brought two bushy brows together, and then smiled. "Oh, yeah. Have a seat, mister. Lt. Bates will talk to you about it; I told him what you said."

A minute later, a round-headed man in a rumpled gray suit came out of the back room. He was polite, like a TV cop. He took Joe into a shabby office in the rear, and let him say it all over again.

"Twenty-first Street, huh?" Bates scratched at a pad with a stubby pencil; from where he sat, Joe could see they were only doodles. "Short oldish guy with a mustache, maybe sixty?"

"Yeah, that's him."

"And you don't think he's dead, mister?"

"I *know* he's not."

"He looked pretty dead, when they brought him in last night. No heartbeat, no breathing, no nothing. The doc who examined him said he was dead. They wrote out a death certificate this morning. Heart failure, it said. And now he's in the morgue, waiting for burial." Lt. Bates spread his hands. "So you see, Mr. Helmer, there's nothing for you to worry about. Go home and get a good rest—"

Joe's palm slapped the table. "You think I'm crazy! You think I'm some kind of nut!"

Bates smiled. "I didn't say that, Mr. Helmer."

"But that's what you think, right?" He put his hands on the table and leaned forward. "But you'll find out different. You'll see what happens when the guy's doc gets back to town—"

"What gave you this idea, Mr. Helmer? What makes you so sure?"

"Because—" Joe swallowed. "Because I saw the guy's wallet. I saw a card in it, that said so. It. . ."

"We didn't find any card."

"I must have dropped it. I—I was scared."

"Scared of what?"

"Stop pickin' on me!" Joe shouted. "I don't know what happened to his wallet. All I know is that he's alive, and that's how you're going to bury him—"

"Did you take the wallet?" asked the cop.

"No!"

"You sure about that?" the cop said gently.

"All right!" Joe Helmer screamed. "So I took his wallet! I thought he was dead. I thought he wouldn't need the dough any more, that's what I thought. Only you got to get a doctor for him—"

Lt. Bates stared at him thoughtfully. Then he picked up the telephone on his desk.

"Max? Was that stiff transferred to the City Morgue yet, or is he still in the freezer?. . .He is? Good."

He hung up, and said: "Would you come with me, Mr. Helmer?"

Joe followed him, across the front room of the precinct house to a door that led below. In a musty chamber, the lieutenant unlocked a door with a frosted glass pane, and they stepped inside a basement room damp with cold.

"This way, Mr. Helmer."

The cop walked toward a gray stone slab, and pulled the sheet from the face of the body that rested on its surface.

"Can you identify this man?" he said.

Joe looked.

"Yes," he gulped. "That's him. That's Marvin Horine."

Bates shook his head.

"No, Mr. Helmer. We know who this man is, and his name's not Horine. His name's Capper, Sonny Capper. We've known him for a long, long time."

"You have?"

"It's our job, to know men like Sonny. He was one of the slickest pickpockets in the East, until that bum heart of his gave out. Now would you mind coming upstairs, Mr. Helmer? We've got some talking to do."

Party Line

(published title: “The Deadly Telephone”)

Aired: May 29, 1960

Teleplay by Henry Slesar

Directed by Don Taylor

Starring: Judy Canova, Arch Johnson, and Ellen Corby

Mrs. Parch was labeling preserve jars in the dining room when the telephone rang, and she paused in her labors to count the identifying rings. *One,* Mrs. Nubhin, *two,* Mrs. Giles, *three,* Mrs. Kalkbrenner, *four*. . .It was her own and Mrs. Parch, sighing with a reaction close to disappointment, wiped her sticky fingers on the generous folds of the apron and walked into the living room. It was only a thirty-foot distance, but she was panting by the time she unhooked the receiver. Mrs. Parch was stout, her figure bell-shaped in the formless gray dress she wore every week day. “Hello?” she said loudly into the mouthpiece.

“Is this Mrs. Helen Parch?” It was a man’s voice, not familiar to her. Her answer was almost resentful.

“Yes, this is Mrs. Parch. Who’s this?”

“My name is Atkins, Mrs. Parch, and I’m with the county sheriff’s office. I wonder if it would be convenient for me to drop in and see you this afternoon? There’s something rather important I have to talk to you about.”

“Important? Are you sure you have the right party?”

“I’m sure Mrs. Parch. It won’t take very long. I’m in Milford at the moment, and it’ll only take me five minutes to drive out to your house.”

“Well, I don’t know.” She was plainly flustered. Even familiar visitors were few in the rural stretches of the county, and the thought of a stranger. . .“Can’t you tell me over the phone, Mr. Atkins? I’m kind of busy today.”

“I’m afraid not, Mrs. Parch. I’m sorry.”

“Well, all right then. Now’s as good a time as any, so I’ll wait for you.”

“Thank you,” Mr. Atkins said gravely, and waited politely for the woman to break the connection. She did, and then looked at the silent instrument with wonder. It was no use going back to her preserving chores, because Mrs. Parch knew that the phone would be ringing again in another few minutes, just as soon as her eavesdroppers thought a decent interval had

passed. She was right, of course; eight minutes later, it gave four short rings, and she heard the flat, nasal voice of Mrs. Giles.

"Helen? How are you? Just thought I'd call and see how things are."

"Uh-huh," Mrs. Parch said, knowingly, but without cynicism. She had shared this party line for almost fifteen years, and it was common knowledge that its members participated in all calls. The open accusation would have shocked all of them, but it was true, nevertheless. "How's Jacob?" Mrs. Parch said casually, preserving the rules of etiquette. "I understand he's been re-siding the barn last couple of days."

"Yes, he's been busy," Mrs. Giles said vaguely. "Well, what's new with you, Helen? Anything interesting happen?"

Mrs. Parch pursed her lips, feeling a sudden defiance. She knew that Mrs. Giles was burning with curiosity about Mr. Atkins, but she wouldn't give her the satisfaction of talking about it. "No, nothing new," she said smugly. "Just finishing up my preserves is all. Part I hate worst of all is making labels. I can hardly hold a pencil with this arthritis of mine."

"You sure that's all?" Mrs. Giles said. "I heard your phone ring a minute ago."

"It was just Mr. Hastings," the woman said coldly. "Calling about my mower. Took it in the other day for sharpening."

"Oh," Mrs. Giles said, and Mrs. Parch chuckled silently somewhere in the vastness of her bosom. She knew that Mrs. Giles recognized the lie, and she also knew she could never be accused of it. Mrs. Giles sniffed into the receiver, said a few more polite words to give the conversation an air of normality, and hung up.

When Mrs. Parch went back to the dining room, she was grinning broadly with satisfaction. Five minutes later, there were three rings, and she scurried across the floor on her tiny feet and noiselessly lifted the receiver, covering the mouthpiece with her hand. It was Mrs. Giles, of course, telling Mrs. Kalkbrenner about the strange man who was paying a call on Mrs. Parch that very afternoon. They speculated as to its meaning, and neither seemed able to satisfy their curiosity.

Mrs. Parch hung up before they did, and went into the bedroom to make herself somewhat more presentable for her expected visitor. He arrived a few minutes later, a lean man with bony ribs that showed through his sweated shirt. He carried his jacket over his arm, and he was mopping at his

high balding forehead with a crumpled handkerchief. “Mrs. Parch?” he said. “I’m Daryl Atkins of the district attorney’s office.”

“Come on in, Mr. Atkins. Well, you certainly made good time.”

“Got here as fast as I could. This kind of thing, well, even a couple of minutes can make a difference.” He looked around the small, cozy parlor, its shade drawn against the sunlight. “Certainly a lot cooler in here,” he said. “Must be ninety on the road.”

“Maybe you’d like a cold drink.”

“I would ma’am, but not until we have a talk.”

He took a seat on the sofa, sitting tentatively on the cushion without putting his damp shirt against the antimacassared back. Mrs. Parch sat in the rocker and folder her plump hands in her lap, waiting patiently.

“Mrs. Parch,” he said, “do you remember a man named Heyward Miller?”

“Miller?” She screwed her face up reflectively. “No, the name doesn’t sound familiar. Course there’s Mrs. Miller at the post office; I don’t suppose there’s any connection.”

“No, no connection.” He frowned, and looked at the tasseled rug at his feet. “Heyward Miller and his wife lived out at the old Yunker place, maybe eight, nine years ago. They were only here six months, when his wife died and he sold the place to the Kalkbrenners. Does that help you to remember, Mrs. Parch?”

She scratched her cheek lightly. “I do remember *something* about him. Yes, now I do.” Her breath came shorter, and she put one hand on her bosom. “Oh, yes. Miller. That awful man! How could I forget about *that?*”

“I thought you’d remember, Mrs. Parch, I mean, after those things he said about you. He was a mighty disturbed fellow, the way I heard the story. Of course, I don’t really know the whole truth; so it’s not my place to pass along any opinion.”

Mrs. Parch drew herself up stiffly. “The man was a fool,” she said harshly. “You ask anybody about him. He just didn’t belong out here.”

“Well, just for my own sake, Mrs. Parch, could we talk about what happened? Just for the record?”

“I’ve got nothing to say about it.”

Atkins sighed. “The way I was told the story, this man Miller and his wife were married about a year when they bought the Yunkers’ place. She

was going to have a baby in three months. Only something happened one night; she got sick, very sick, and he tried to put through a call to the doctor."

Mrs. Parch closed her eyes and clenched her fists on her lap.

"Now, I wasn't in the county at the time, you understand, so all I can do is report what I was told. But as I understand it. Miller got on the phone and you and another lady were talking. Swapping recipes or something like that."

"It was Mrs. Anderson," the woman said quietly. "I was talking to Mrs. Anderson."

"She still live in the neighborhood?"

"No. Her and her husband moved to California five years ago, and she died."

"Anyway," Mr. Atkins said, mopping his face, "this man Miller asked if you'd get off the line so he could call the doctor for his wife. The story I hear is that you both refused."

"He was rude," Mrs. Parch said. "He was downright insulting to us."

"Yes. Nevertheless, you wouldn't get off the line, and Miller couldn't get through. Matter of fact, he claims you stayed on deliberately so's he couldn't get through."

"That's a lie!" Mrs. Parch said passionately. "We talked just as long as we had to, and no longer."

"But he didn't get the doctor in time, that was the whole point, wasn't it? And his wife died."

"Now look here, Mr. Atkins—"

The thin man raised a bony hand. "Please Mrs. Parch, I didn't come out to rehash the past. All that is your business and none of mine. Except that something happened this morning, and it sort of makes it the business of the county sheriff's office."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I don't reckon you know what happened to Miller after he sold his place to the Kalkbrenners. He was pretty broken up about losing his wife and all, he moved to New York City. Six months later, he got in trouble for breaking into a hardware store. Didn't take anything but a few boxes of nails and stuff like that, and he was sent to prison for about six months. It was in prison that they decided he was mentally incompetent, and he was

remanded to a state institution. He's been there ever since, almost eight years. Only now he's got away, Mrs. Parch, and that's why we're a little concerned."

"Got away?" The woman crumpled the hem of her apron into her hand. "How do you mean, got away?"

"Escaped. We got the news late last night, but it's over a week since it happened. Somebody at the institution thought of notifying us, since Miller used to do a lot of raving about. . .well, what happened. Kind of made us uneasy, Mrs. Parch. I guess you can understand that. Now we don't know for sure that he wants to make trouble for you, but it didn't seem right to take any chances. You see what I mean?"

Mrs. Parch stood up, the bell of her dress swaying slightly. Her voice quivered when she said: "You mean you think this Miller is after me? For what happened eight years ago?"

"The man's not to be trusted," Atkins said quietly. "That's the whole point. The institution was maybe two hundred miles from here, but if he was really out for—well, I guess you'd call it revenge—that's not such a distance to travel. I wanted to warn you about the possibility, that's all."

She put her hands to her face. "But I'm all alone out here!" she said. "He could murder me in my sleep!"

"We're really not sure of anything, Mrs. Parch. I don't want you to get that idea. But if you could get a neighbor or somebody to stay with you for a few days, or else visit a relative or something, it just might be a good idea."

"Can't the sheriff protect me?" She caught a sob in her throat.

"I'm afraid that's not possible right now, Mrs. Parch. Not unless we had more positive information that Miller was in the vicinity. The way things are now, this is just a wild surmise. You understand?"

"Yes, yes," she said numbly. "Maybe I could go to my sister's place. In Cedar Falls."

"That might be a good idea."

"I haven't seen her in ten years. We never got along, my sister and me."

Mr. Atkins smiled. "There's always a good time for a reconciliation, eh, Mrs. Parch?" He stood up. "Listen, I didn't come here just to alarm you. There's nothing definite about this, nothing at all. If we learn anything further, we'll call you up just as soon as we do. And if you have any reason

to get in touch with us, just ask for the county sheriff's office. Speak to me personally. You remember the name?"

"Atkins," Mrs. Parch whispered.

"Daryl Atkins," the man said. Then he smiled broadly, and stood up. "I sure wouldn't mind that cold drink now, Mrs. Parch."

Atkins's automobile wasn't five minutes out of her driveway, when the telephone jangled four times. She answered it, and heard Mrs. Grimes say: "Helen? Did I see a car stop at your place?"

"No," she said raspingly. "You didn't see any car."

"But I thought sure I—"

"Mind your own business!" the woman said angrily. "Can't you ever learn to mind your own business?"

"Well!" Mrs. Giles said. She hung up, and Mrs. Parch cursed the fact that she hadn't done it first. A few minutes later, the telephone rang three times, but she ignored it. Instead, she went upstairs as rapidly as her weight and failing breath allowed, and began rummaging through the bureau drawers for the telephone number of her sister in Cedar Falls. She found it at last, among an album of yellowed snapshots, and brought the scrap of paper downstairs. She picked up the phone receiver without any attempt at surreptitiousness, but Mrs. Giles and Mrs. Kalkbrenner had already concluded their conversation concerning her bad manners. She dialed the operator, and had to wait almost ten minutes before they had a line cleared to Cedar Falls. Even then it did no good, because the Cedar Falls operator reported that her sister's telephone had been discontinued for the summer. It was just like Margaret, who had probably gone to the beach house, to save a few dollars by cutting off the phone service. She grunted angrily when she heard the news, and the unkind thoughts about her sister drove out all her fears about Miller for awhile. She was even sufficiently recovered to complete the labelling of her preserves, and spent a busy afternoon hauling them down to the cellar. She was so preoccupied that when the phone rang five times (it was for Mrs. Ammons, a new neighbor) she didn't care enough to listen in, despite her natural curiosity. By evening, she hadn't forgotten about Atkins's warning, but her nerves had been soothed considerably.

It had been a long day. The sun had stayed high and hot, and it was almost eight-thirty when it finally dipped behind the brown hills and let the

cool night air take over. She made herself a simple supper of yesterday's leftovers, did a little sewing, and then settled down with a rental library novel to conclude the evening. The telephone rang twice, but she ignored it. A moment later, she heard a dog barking near the house. It was the Giles's dog, an aging collie, not given to outbursts of canine temper. She wondered at it mildly, and put down the book. When the barking continued, she took off her glasses, got up, and went to the window. The sudden recollection of her possible peril sent a shock of fear through her body. She went to the front door, unlatched it, and looked outside, into the uninformative darkness. She closed it again, bolted it, and went to turn on an additional lamp in the parlor. The Giles's dog stopped barking and began to howl, until someone applied the end of a rolled newspaper to its bottom. There was a clumping noise below, in her cellar, as if something had fallen to the stone floor, and she knew that she was no longer the sole occupant of the house.

She almost stumbled on her way to the telephone. When she picked up the receiver and heard Mrs. Giles's nasal voice, she gasped. "Please! Get off the phone!"

"Who's that?" Mrs. Giles said.

"Helen," Mrs. Parch said. "It's Helen! For God's sake, Emma, get off the line. I have to call the police—"

"The police! Whatever for?"

"I don't have time to explain! I have to call the sheriff's office! Get off the phone! Get off the phone or I'll be killed!"

Mrs. Kalkbrenner laughed. "Now who'd want to kill you, Helen? You must be having nightmares."

"I thought you said it was preserves you were putting up," Mrs. Giles tittered. "Sure it wasn't a little cider, Helen?"

"For heaven's sake!" Mrs. Parch shrieked. "Get off the phone!"

"You see what I mean," Mrs. Giles said significantly to Mrs. Kalkbrenner. "You see what I was telling you?"

"Umph," Mrs. Kalkbrenner said. "I certainly do."

"Some people just don't know what courtesy means," Mrs. Giles said. "It's a good thing to really know your neighbors, isn't it, June?"

"It sure is, Emma."

"Please, please," Mrs. Parch sobbed. "I've got to get through. I've got to use the phone—"

She dropped the receiver when she heard the sound of creaking stairs in the cellar. She ran into the kitchen and slammed the cellar door shut. The latch didn't hold, so she put a chair against it, and ran back to the dangling receiver. She heard Mrs. Giles's voice again, and screamed in hatred and terror at her. She was still screaming when the hand took the receiver from her and replaced it on the hook. It was a thick, hairy hand, and possessed of terrible strength.

The Money

(published title: “Trust Me, Mr. Paschetti”)

Aired: November 29, 1960

Teleplay by Henry Slesar

Starring: Robert Loggia and Doris Dowling

She told me to make money, and I said I would. I tried to kiss her, but she turned her head away and showed me the slim white column of her neck. I kissed it so hard that I left teeth marks, and that made her sore. She called me something dirty, and I laughed. Then she said something worse; she said: “Don’t get big ideas. Shorty.”

I shoved her away from me and went to the window of her room, where the red neon across the street flashed on and off and hid the rising color in my face. I didn’t like being called Shorty, not by anybody. And not by Angie, that was for sure. In Angie’s eyes, I wanted to be ten feet tall.

“What’s the matter, Larry? You hurt?” She giggled softly in the darkness behind me. Teasing. For a minute, I felt like things hadn’t changed at all, that I was still the sawed-off neighborhood punk I used to be. I forgot I was grown up, and smart enough to get nods from the big boys, and even an occasional job. It was like I was fifteen again, and she was the spindle-legged hot-looking blonde kid who had moved into the block and made the street-corner gang hoot and whistle and whisper among themselves.

But then I remembered. I was almost thirty, and Angie knew I was worth a second look. I made six hundred and fifty bucks a week, regular, out of commissions from the wire joint Patsy ran. And I wasn’t so bad looking, even if I measured only five-seven in the built-up shoes.

I lit a cigarette before I turned around, and stuck it between my lips. I knew that Angie liked the way I looked smoking, the smoke making my eyes dreamy and half-closed. I said: “Look, don’t play games with me, Angie. I’m not fooling around about this. I want to marry you.”

“I’m not fooling, either,” she said, still with a giggle. “I’m no chicken any more, Larry. It’s about time I settled down. I told you.”

“And I told you. The money’ll come, don’t worry about that. I got lots of ideas.”

“Oh, yeah?” Her voice sneered. “I suppose you’re going to give Patsy some competition?”

“Nah, nothing like that. I got smarter ideas than that. Big ideas.” I walked over to her and grabbed her arms. She made a fight out of it for a while, and then relaxed. “I’ll get money, Angie. I swear it.”

“Show me, Larry,” she said. “Show me and it’s a deal.”

“I will,” I said.

The next morning, I walked into Patsy’s and told the boys that I was quitting. Nobody got very excited about it; it was a kind of left-handed insult that they didn’t shove me around and ask a lot of questions. I guess they never figured me for a troublemaker. I was just Larry, little Larry from around the corner. They wouldn’t miss me, and I wouldn’t miss them.

I took the subway over the bridge and got off at Canal Street. Then I took a bus the rest of the way until I arrived at the crummy downtown building that housed the Paschetti Import Company. I was disappointed when I saw it; I thought that Paschetti would have swanky appointments, an office that would live up to his reputed income. I didn’t learn until later that Paschetti spent only one day a week there; that most of his business was transacted out of his duplex apartment on Central Park South.

There was a cranky old dame behind the frosted glass cage guarding the entrance to Paschetti’s sanctum. She looked me over like I was dust and went on plugging holes in the switchboard. I said: “Is Mr. Paschetti in? I’m Larry Fabrizio, I’ve got an appointment.”

“What did you want to see Mr. Paschetti about?”

I felt a hot answer in my mouth, but I swallowed it. I needed a new personality around here, I had to be a calm, likeable type. I smiled at her and said:

“It’s in reference to a job. Mr. Paschetti knows about it. Would you please tell him I’m here?” I gave her the smile and the bedroom eyes, and she called her boss.

He was behind a chewed-up old desk when I walked into the office, and for a minute I forgot about the wheelchair. I wondered if it was true what I’d heard, that it was solid gold. Then he pushed it back and I could see it was just an ordinary stainless steel job, like any cripple would use. I looked at the chair, and then I looked at his face. He was a little like me, I thought, short and dark with quick eyes that looked fifty places in one glance. Only he was older, of course, maybe fifty or sixty. His hair was dark black, but I

think he dyed it; there were grey fringes to his short, neat mustache. He waved his hand at me, and I sat down.

"So you're Tony's boy," he said, with a kind of grunt. "What am I supposed to do, cheer?"

"Of course not," I said, smiling amiably. "I just thought I'd look you up, Mr. Paschetti, like you once told my Pop I should."

"Your Pop was a jerk, you know that?" He watched me carefully.

I just smiled.

"Him and me, we came to this country the same day. For twenty-seven years, he broke his back on the construction gangs. So what happens? He starves, he raises his family in a lousy neighborhood, he gets hit with a lead ball and he dies. Am I describing a jerk, or what?"

"He was a nice old guy," I said guardedly.

"Agh!" Paschetti slammed the desk blotter. "Nice guys are stupid. Are you stupid, kid?"

I had to watch this one. I didn't know what I was dealing with in Paschetti. My father had talked my ear off about him for twenty years, but I still didn't know what he was really like. All I knew was that he had made it big, after he fell off a girder, in the import business. Cars, furniture, religious articles, all kinds of stuff from Europe, mostly Italy. He was worth plenty, but my Pop never asked him for a dime.

"I'm not stupid," I said, straight-faced. "But I try to be a nice guy, too, sir."

He looked me over, and grunted again. Then he didn't say anything for a while, just looked out of the window. Finally, he wheeled himself out in front of the desk and began snapping questions at me.

"You speak Italian?"

"I get along."

"You know how to write out orders, keep neat records, files, that kind of junk?"

"I had a year of business administration," I said.

"You dress pretty good? Got more than that one suit?"

"I got four more like it."

"You willing to work any hours? Night, sometimes?"

"Sure."

"You know anything about the import business?"

I hesitated. “Nothing.”

“Good!”

Then he pushed the chair up closer and looked me square in the face. “I know that lousy neighborhood you come from. Patsy’s and all that stuff. You ever get mixed up with them?”

“No, sir,” I said.

“Tony Fabrizio was a jerk. But he never took a nickel from nobody if he didn’t have it coming. How about you, Larry?”

His face was so close I could feel his breath.

“You honest, Larry? Could I trust you?”

This was it.

“Yes, sir,” I said.

He straightened up and wheeled back to the other side of the desk. “Okay, you got a job, three hundred bucks a week and maybe a bonus at Christmas if I like your style. You come here Monday morning at nine and I’ll get Vince, my general manager, to show you the ropes. Only remember that I do a lot of work out of my apartment; that’s where my customers come. You be there when I tell you to be there. Right?”

“Sure, Mr. Paschetti,” I said. “Thanks a lot.”

“Agh,” he said. “Get outa here.”

I got out, and went to see Angie.

She looked at me like I was crazy when I told her my salary. “Three hundred bucks a week? Are you kidding? You were making twice that with Patsy—”

“Yeah, sure. But I’m thinking about the future.”

“The *future?* Have you flipped or something? What are you gonna do, work yourself up?”

“Maybe,” I grinned.

“Well, if you think I’m gonna wait twenty-five years until you get your gold watch—.”

“Maybe I better explain something to you,” I said. “This guy Paschetti’s really loaded. He probably makes more quick import sales than any guy on the east coast.”

Angie looked bored.

“And you know why? Because he deals in cash, no questions asked about where the merchandise comes from. It’s strictly legit as far as he’s

concerned; what his suppliers do is none of his business. Some guy has a big shipment of something to unload, he goes up to Paschetti's apartment, Paschetti hands him the dough on the spot. Some guy wants to buy some merchandise, real cheap, he goes up there and makes the deal. No papers, no books, no nothing. I figure he must keep fifty, a hundred, maybe two hundred grand in cash around all the time."

She was perking up.

"And what are you gonna do about it? Swipe it?"

"It won't be as easy as that. Paschetti's no dope. I'll plan one big haul, and take my time about it. And then—we'll have enough money to skip the country, live it up big somewhere like South America. Rio. Whatever you want."

"Rio," Angie breathed, looking out of the window where the frost was dripping on the panes. "It's sunny in Rio, ain't it, Larry?"

"All the time, honey," I said, taking her in my arms.

For the next couple of weeks, I got my basic training from Vince, Paschetti's general manager. Vince was a slob. He knew every item in the inventory down to the last scrap, and he could name the most distant cousin of every customer Paschetti dealt with, but they got machines as smart as Vince. I could see he didn't like me right off the bat; maybe he thought I was competition for his job. I could have laughed in his big spaghetti-fed face. All I wanted was one chunk of dough, and he could keep his lousy career.

I didn't even get to smell Paschetti's cash until a month later. One day, he called me at the office and said:

"Hey, paisano. You come to the apartment around 8:30. I'm having a couple of customers in. All right?"

"Sure, Mr. Paschetti," I said.

I showed up in my best blue suit, thinking I would knock their eyes out. But the clothes Paschetti had on that night made it look like a bargain basement reject.

The apartment was a duplex with a mile-high ceiling and a knockout view of Central Park. Class.

The guests arrived on time. One of them was named Georgia; I never got the other name. Georgia was a frail-looking old guy with white hair and mustaches; he looked like an old opera-company impresario. His English

was lousy, so we held the entire conversation in Italian. It was okay, except that Georgia coughed rackingly after every other sentence. Paschetti introduced me like I was his favorite son, and the whole affair seemed like a social gathering until ten o'clock when Georgia said:

"I understand the automobile business is much improved, Tomaso. What do you think the market would be for a dozen Alfa-Novas? In factory condition, of course?"

Paschetti lit a match. "I think it wouldn't be so bad, Georgia, depending, of course, upon the suggested price."

"My cousin, the automobile dealer, suggests that $20,000 is a fair amount," the white-haired guy said, puffing on the black cigar that Paschetti lit for him. "What would your company say to that suggestion?" Then he coughed.

Paschetti waited for the fit to stop.

"The Alfa-Nova," Georgio continued, looking at me, "is, to my knowledge, an excellent vehicle. And with the American interest so great in foreign automobiles—" He glanced at his partner, a dull squat type. "That is true, is it not cousin?"

The cousin grunted, and Paschetti slapped the arms of his wheelchair.

"I think the company accepts the terms," he said.

A few minutes later, Paschetti rolled into the other room, and returned with a bulky white envelope. My eyes bugged when I realized what the contents were.

Georgio put the envelope in his pocket, and we all had another round of drinks. That was all there was to it.

The next time I visited Paschetti's apartment, the transaction was going the other way. An icy-eyed character named Lundy was the visitor, and he was interested in buying, not selling. There was no small talk; they made a deal for five of the imported autos, at a price that showed a nice quick profit for Paschetti. Only Lundy wasn't as easy going about money; he'd pay upon delivery.

"Fine with me," Paschetti said. "My assistant, Mr. Fabrizio, will arrange for immediate shipment, and accept payment. All right?"

"Okay," Lundy said, looking at me coldly.

Three days later, I was sent to a warehouse on some bleak spot on the Sound, and saw to it that five of the shiny autos were loaded on the trailer. I

brought them to Lundy's lot in Brooklyn, and Lundy handed me an envelope, sealed. I looked at it all the way back to Paschetti's apartment.

By the end of the fourth month in Paschetti's employment, I had my plan blueprinted. It wasn't too soon, either; Angie was getting impatient and more than a little skeptical. All I needed was the opportunity.

It came along, in the form of twelve hundred business machines.

I first heard about the deal from Vince. He said something casual about it but I could tell from his face that it was one of the biggest in Paschetti's recent history. The machines had been made by the Olgarini Corporation of Rome, and they were worth a potful. Our old pal, Georgia, was involved in the transaction, and the payoff was going to be something. After pumping Vince, I gathered it should amount to about eighty thousand.

One morning, Paschetti called me and said:

"Hey, paisano. Big stuff tonight; you be at my place around eight, okay?"

"Sure, Mr. Paschetti. Who's coming up? Mr. Lorenzo?"

"Yeah, Georgia's coming. You just be there, and keep your eyes open. Right?"

"Right, Mr. Paschetti," I grinned. But inside, I wasn't grinning. I was thinking.

At lunchtime, I went out and found myself a nice quiet phone booth in the corner of a luncheonette. I had Georgia's phone number, even if it was unlisted. Paschetti had a habit of mumbling aloud when he was reading anything or dialing, and it was easy for me to get the number I wasn't supposed to know. I dialed it now, and a servant's voice answered. I asked for Georgia, in a voice that was as good an imitation of Paschetti's as months of listening and practicing could produce. I spoke in Italian.

"Hey, Georgia? This is Tomaso. Listen, I can't make it tonight. Something came up, something important."

Georgia coughed. Then, politely, he asked what was more important than business?

"It is business, tax business. I have to see a man about the taxes." I knew it was an explanation Georgia would understand. I could practically see him nodding his head wisely at the other end. "But we can still do business," I said. "I'm sending you my assistant, Larry. He'll bring the money. All right?"

“Then the $80,000 is all right?”

I swallowed. “It’s all right, Georgia. The company accepts the terms.”

“Good,” Georgio said, and I hung up.

I came out of the phone booth and found that I was sweating so hard that my shirt was like a second skin. I went to the counter and ordered a sandwich that I couldn’t finish. I hung around until the big clock over the coffee urn said two, and then I went back into the booth. I dialed the number of Paschetti’s apartment.

“Georgio Lorenzo calling,” I said, when the servant answered.

When Paschetti got on the phone, I almost lost my nerve. It was tougher sounding like Georgio; I hadn’t heard him as much as I had Paschetti. But I did it.

“What’s up, Georgio?” Paschetti said brusquely.

“About tonight,” I said in Italian. “I have a bad chest. I cannot leave the house.”

“That’s too bad,” Paschetti said sympathetically. “We will make it some other night, then, Georgio, when you feel better.”

“No, no,” I said hastily. “Business is business. I wish to conclude the transaction as soon as possible, Tomaso. Perhaps, if you were to bring the money to my house this evening—”

“I, Georgio?”

“Your assistant, I mean. That young man, Larry. He is trustworthy, yes?”

There was a long quiet second on the other end, and for a moment I thought the plan was shot to hell.

Then Paschetti said: “All right, Georgio. I will send Larry. But still the terms are not settled. The company finds it must offer $70,000 for the merchandise. What is your opinion?”

“I accept,” I said hoarsely, and coughed just like Georgio.

“In that case,” Paschetti said gravely, “you will receive the money tonight.”

I went back to the office, so flushed and shaky that the switchboard girl and Vince both asked if I was sick. Paschetti didn’t call me for the first hour after my return, and I worried more with every passing minute. What if Georgio really called him, for some reason? That was all that I needed to smash the plan into a million pieces.

Then, just before four o'clock, Paschetti telephoned.

"Tonight is off," he said crisply. "But you're still working. I want you to take something to Georgio Lorenzo's house. He lives in Queens; you know how to get there?"

"I know," I smiled. "I knew a girl in Queens once."

"Stay away from the girls tonight. This is important, Larry. You understand me?"

"Sure, Mr. Paschetti."

"Come up to the apartment around seven-thirty, and I give you the package. Take it straight to Mr. Lorenzo, no stops. *Capish?*"

"I *capish,* Mr. Paschetti," I said.

When I arrived home after work, I heard the telephone ringing the second I put the key in the lock. It was Angie, and she was full of complaints. I told her that I couldn't see her tonight, that I was working, but she started acting so sulky that I said okay. I changed my clothes, and went to her place around six-thirty. She was wearing a grimy old neglige, and her hair looked like a recently used mop. Angie never knocked herself out to look beautiful for me, but she still affected me the same way.

"So what is it tonight?" she said acidly. "More business?"

"That's right," I told her. "Big business."

"Nice work," she jeered. "You keep it up, buster. You may get a five-buck raise yet."

I grabbed her elbow. "You don't understand, Angie. I told you how things were."

"You told me, all right. Months ago, you told me."

I didn't want to tell her the story, but the sight of her bitter face made me change my mind. I told her about the business machines, and the payoff that was taking place that night, and about my telephone calls to the two principals. She listened, bug-eyed, breathing hard.

"How much?" she said. "How much, Larry?"

"Seventy thousand." I lit a cigarette, and let the smoke get in my eyes. "Seventy thousand U.S. American dollars." Then I kissed her, and it was all I could do to make Paschetti's apartment on time.

He was sitting at a carved mahogany desk when I walked in. I think he liked being behind a desk; it made the wheelchair less conspicuous. There

was a white envelope on the blotter in front of him, but he wasn't looking at it.

"Here I am, Mr. Paschetti," I said.

"Yeah," he answered.

"You got Mr. Lorenzo's address, sir?"

"It's on the envelope."

"Should I go now, Mr. Paschetti?"

"In a minute." He looked at me. "I been thinking about something."

"Yes, sir."

"I been thinking about Fay. Your mother."

"My mother, Mr. Paschetti?"

"Yeah. To you, she was just a nice old lady who cooked your meals and sent you to school and junk like that. Right?"

"My mother died when I was twelve, Mr. Paschetti."

"Yeah, sure, I remember. I opened up the downtown office that year, I remember it good. Only maybe you didn't know something about your mother. Her and me, we were engaged once, back in Milano. A family thing, an arrangement, you know? Only then she met your Pop, and that made things different. You know about that, Larry?" He chuckled. "I could have been your father, things worked out the other way."

I never heard Paschetti talk so sentimental. It made me feel stronger than him. I said:

"I wouldn't have minded that, sir."

He looked up sharply. "You were better off the way you were! Don't get any wrong ideas. Your Pop was the best guy on earth. Stupid, but the best."

"Sure, Mr. Paschetti."

He sighed, and tossed the envelope at me.

"Beat it," he said. "When you get this delivered, give me a call here. I want to know Georgio received it."

"You bet, Mr. Paschetti."

I took the thick envelope and stuck it in my pocket. Then I turned and went out.

I got a shock when I came back to the apartment. Angie was waiting in the hallway downstairs, and she had a bag packed.

"What the hell's the idea?" I said.

"Larry!" She threw her thin arms around me, and I shoved her away.

"What do you think you're doing? What's the suitcase for?"

"Did you get it, Larry? The money?"

"Who told you to come here? I said I had business tonight. You heard me."

She backed off and stared at me. Then she began cursing. It was something to hear; Angie's an expert.

"You were lying! You didn't get any money. I knew you wouldn't have the nerve—"

"I wouldn't, huh?" Angrily, I went upstairs and put the key in the lock. I pushed her inside ahead of me, and then whipped the envelope out of my pocket. Then I ripped it open, and the bills fell out like a green snowfall, all over the ratty carpet. Angie dived for them, crowing like a crazy hen. She began shuffling and counting the bills, giggling and crying at the same time.

"Seventy thousand dollars!" she shrieked. "Oh my God, I never saw so much money in my life. Seventy thousand *bucks!*"

I grabbed the bills from her hand and put them all back in a neat stack. Then I shoved them in my pocket again and said:

"Okay, now you saw it. Big thrill. Now you can get the hell out of here and wait until I call you."

She stared at me stupidly. I felt good, being able to tell Angie off.

"What do you mean?" she said. "I got my bag all packed. Ain't we leaving town?"

"No! I got other plans."

"Plans? What plans?"

"None of your business," I snarled. "Now get out of here and go back to your place. Wait there until I call you. Understand?"

For a moment, I thought she was going to throw herself at me like a tigress. But then her face went dull, and she picked up the suitcase. She turned once before going out, her face bewildered, looking so comical I wanted to laugh.

I hung around until nine-thirty, and then I left. I took a taxi to Paschetti's apartment.

When I rang the doorbell, Paschetti's servant opened it and didn't look surprised. But he was the only one. When I walked into the front room, Paschetti almost fell out of his wheelchair. As for Georgio, he looked like he might have a fatal asthmatic attack right then and there.

“Hello, Mr. Paschetti,” I said.

“*Larry!*”

“Good evening, Mr. Lorenzo,” I said in Italian. “I’m sorry for all the trouble I caused you.”

“What the hell’s going on?” Paschetti said hoarsely. “What do you think you’re doing?”

I didn’t answer. Instead, I went straight up to Paschetti’s desk and lifted the big bills out of my pocket. I counted them carefully, one by one, and stacked them on his desk blotter.

“Seventy thousand, Mr. Paschetti. You can count ‘em again, if you want.”

He looked at them, and he looked at me, and he didn’t know what to say.

“I’m sorry,” I told them both. “It looked like it was gonna be easy. I was all ready to hop a boat for South America, but then I got to thinking—”

“You called me,” the white-haired old guy said accusingly. “You called me on the telephone.”

“Sure, Mr. Lorenzo. I called you, and I called Mr. Paschetti here. I thought I was being real smart, only I forgot something. I forgot about my old man.”

Lorenzo turned to Paschetti, shrugging helplessly.

“Listen, kid—” Paschetti said.

“I know what you’re going to say, Mr. Paschetti. I tried to rob you, and you can do whatever you want to me. But then I got to thinking about what you said, about my Pop. And I began to remember things about him I thought I’d forgotten. He was a pretty dumb guy, all right, just like you said. But I loved him, Mr. Paschetti. I couldn’t do this to him. That’s why I came back.”

I turned and started to leave, but Paschetti bellowed after me.

“Stay!” he said. “You hear me, Larry? Stay!”

I turned and saw tears in his eyes.

I went to Angie’s apartment around midnight. When I told her what I’d done, she didn’t get sore, or scream, or try and scratch my eyes out. She just looked at me, like I was some kind of idiot, shaking her head and saying: “Why, Larry? Why? Why?”

I laughed. I laughed so hard that my stomach hurt when the laughing stopped.

"Don't you see? Don't you get it, you dope? Seventy grand's okay, but it's no fortune. Now I got something better than that. Much better! Something that'll pay off in *two hundred* grand in a few more months."

"*I got his trust.*"

She looked at me, and she understood, and we both felt so good that we went out and got drunk. I drank so much I passed out, and did a lot of wild talking in Italian. Angie told me I was talking about my father, but she couldn't tell me what I said. Angie doesn't know Italian, thank God.

A Crime for Mothers

Aired: January 24, 1961

Teleplay by Henry Slesar

Directed by Ida Lupine

Starring: Claire Trevor and Biff Elliott

Two drinks and she was ready. She took a taxi to the Birdwells small house in Queens, sitting in the back seat with her lips clamped as tight as the purse in her lap. She came out of the cab like a lady, tossing the dyed fox stole over her shoulder. Lottie Mead was never so ladylike as when whiskey was warming her interior.

It was the woman who answered the door. “Hello, Mrs. Birdwell,” Lottie said throatily. “I ain’t too late to see him, am I?”

“No,” the woman said. “My husband just took Eileen to school. He’s in the living room.” Behind the woman, Lottie saw the man. She walked inside, swinging her purse.

“What do you want here?” he growled. “You said you’d never bother us again. What’s the idea?”

“Please, Artie,” his wife, the peacemaker said. “I’m sure Miss Mead had a good reason for coming. Won’t you sit down?” she asked Lottie. “I’ve made coffee, if you’d like some.”

“No, thanks.” Lottie sat, pulling the skirt over her knees. She said: “It’s too bad Eileen had to go to school; I’d’ve liked to see her.”

“You’re forgetting something,” Birdwell said tightly. “You weren’t going to see Eileen, not ever. That was part of the agreement, seven years ago.”

“Seven years? My, how the time flies!”

“Flies is right,” he said, frowning at his watch. “And I’ve got half an hour to my next train. Miss Mead, so maybe you better get to the point.”

“You know something?” Lottie said brightly. “I think maybe I’ll have that coffee, Mrs. Bird well.”

When it was in front of her, poured by the woman’s trembling hand, Lottie was ready to make her announcement.

“I changed my mind about Eileen. I want her back.”

Birdwell cursed, and his wife made a noise that was either a sigh or a groan. The man said: “I figured it was something like that. But you can

forget it; a deal is a deal, and Eileen doesn't know you from a hole in the ground."

"I'm no hole in the ground. I'm her mother!"

"You were all ready to abandon Eileen when we met. You didn't care if she lived or died—"

"That's what I should have done!" Lottie wailed, suddenly tearful. "I should have left her on a church step or something, better than with stingy people like you—"

"What are you talking about?" Birdwell said angrily. "We gave you the money you needed; we took Eileen and raised her as our own. We would have adopted her, if you hadn't made it so difficult to find you."

"Could I help it if I was sick? But I'm better now, and I want my kid back. I'll get a lawyer—"

"Get a lawyer! I'm not afraid of anything you can do; we won't have any trouble proving the kind of mother you are."

Lottie opened her purse and dug for a handkerchief. She found one, but not before the flask bottle clanked dully against her housekeys. She snapped it shut, and sat up.

"All right," she said calmly. "I'm a reasonable person. You love Eileen, only I'm her mother. The least you could do is help me out, for her sake."

"What kind of help?"

"I got awful big expenses. I told you I was sick? I need at least two hundred and fifty dollars a week."

"Let me get this straight," Birdwell said slowly. "You want us to contribute money to you every week?"

"Is that so wrong? I got no place else to turn. You wouldn't want Eileen's mother sleeping in the gutter, would you?"

"Oh, my God," the woman whispered.

Birdwell drummed his fingers on the sofa arm. "Miss Mead, do you know what you're asking? I'm a civil engineer. I make $750 after deductions, and it's still not enough for us. You expect me to give you two hundred and fifty out of that?"

"All right," she said. "Make it two hundred."

"I'm sorry." The man stood up. "It's no deal. You want to get a lawyer, go ahead."

“You think I won’t? I’ll get a lawyer and take Eileen from you. I never signed nothing. You’ll never see her again, you cheapskates.”

“You’ll never do it. They’ll know what you are, a broken-down drunk __”

Lottie tossed the stole. “I can go a long time between drinks, mister. You’d be surprised what I can do when my mind’s made up. So you better think it over.”

She went to the front door, opened it, and then started to slam it behind her. But she changed her mind, smiled thinly, and left the door open. Birdwell had to slam it shut himself.

Lottie’s search for a lawyer the following week was more than a waste of time, it was a downright embarrassment. The reek of whiskey and the tale of thwarted motherhood put cynical smiles on the faces of the attorneys she talked to, and she was still without benefit of counsel when the week ended.

She was dozing Saturday afternoon when the knock on her door awoke her. She called out a thick “come in!” and raised herself groggily from the day bed. When she saw that her visitor was a man, she pushed the frizzled hair away from her face. “Do I know you?” she said.

The man wore a gray suit over an Hawaiian sports shirt. He was short, with thinning black hair and a sharp, sallow face. He dropped into a chair and put his hat on his knee. “My names is Ames,” he said. “Phil Ames. You don’t know me, but I know you. I hear you been looking around town for a lawyer.”

“So what’s it to you?”

“So I’m a lawyer,” he smiled.

“You? You look more like a pickpocket.”

“I doubt that,” he said affably. “I was admitted by the Bar Association in ‘49. I’ve been specializing in negligence cases up to now, but my luck ran bad. Friend of mine told me about you, so I thought I’d stop over. Okay with you?”

“It won’t do any good,” Lottie said glumly. “I ain’t got a dime. That’s all you ambulance chasers care about.”

“I didn’t ask about fees. I just want to hear your story.”

Lottie, accustomed to her little speech by now, ran through it again.

“What’s your first name?” he asked.

“Lottie.”

“You know what I think, Lottie? I don’t’ think you care two hoots to get this kid of yours back. What does a goodtime lady like you want with a seven-year-old kid?”

“Listen, if you’re going to talk like that—”

“Relax,” Ames said, spinning his hat. “I know what you really want. And that’s why I’m interested.”

“And what’s that?”

“Money, Lottie. You just want to milk this Birdwell couple for everything you can. Am I right or wrong?”

“You go to hell.”

“Okay,” he said, getting up. “If that’s how you feel.”

“What’s your hurry?” Lottie said. “You haven’t done any talking yet.”

“Now that,” the lawyer grinned, “is more like it.” He pulled up a chair and looked straight in her rheumy eyes. “How much did you ask them for?”

“Two hundred a week. I wanted two hundred and fifty, but he cried poor. He’s an engineer; he doesn’t make much.”

“Ha. You see ads for engineers all the time, they make a bundle. Anyway, your approach is all wrong. This annuity stuff gets messy; better to get a lump sum out of them. How would fifty grand look to you right now?”

Lottie sighed. “Like a million!”

“If I show you how to get it, my fee’s 20 percent.”

“You show me how to get the money—not the kid, mind you—and it’ll be worth it.”

Ames looked at his fingernails.

“You kidnap her.”

“What?”

“You heard me. What’s the kid’s name?”

“Eileen.”

“You kidnap Eileen. Put the snatch on her. You take her off someplace and phone the Birdwells that you won’t give her back. Unless they pay up.”

“Are you crazy? You think I want a kidnapping rap? They send you away for life, doing a thing like that!”

Ames’ grin broadened. “For doing what? Repossessing your own property? You’re wrong, Lottie. There’s nothing crooked about taking back

your own kid. I've heard of a dozen cases like that, separated couples snatching their kids from each other. Nobody goes to jail; it's just a matter of a court deciding where the kid rightfully belongs."

"But they'll call the cops! They'll sue me!"

"They'll be too worried to do that. I'll act in your behalf after you grab Eileen, and scare them plenty. Possession's nine-tenths of the law—and you've got the birth certificate. You do, don't you?"

"Sure, I got it."

"It can't miss, Lottie," Ames said. "I'll do all the spadework. I'll stake out the Birdwell's house and learn Eileen's schedule. I'll figure out the best time and place to do the job." He chuckled. "I'll finger the kid for you."

Lottie shivered. "Don't put it like that. It sounds so criminal!"

"Sorry," Ames said pleasantly. "I forgot all about mother love."

Lottie didn't see Ames for four days, and she spent two of them in an alcoholic fog. Then, on Thursday evening, he arrived with details of the plan.

"It's a cinch," he said cheerfully. "The kid gets taken to school every morning by her old man, but at three she takes a bus home, all by herself. That's when we do it."

"How will I know her?"

"I'll point her out, don't worry. You just walk up to the bus stop and say that her Mommy sent you. You tell her you're the new cleaning woman that's coming to work there—"

"Cleaning woman?" Lottie said indignantly.

"You say you've come to take her to her mother downtown, see, to buy her some new clothes. Then you hail a cab and take her to your place. Not here," he said, curling his lip. "You better move out of this dump, get yourself a hotel room. The Birdwells can get this address in the phone book, just like I did. And I don't want them to know where you are."

"I can move down the street, to the Majestic."

"Do it this weekend. Don't leave any forwarding address here, and register under a different name. You do that, and we can do the trick next Monday."

"You know something?" Lottie said coquettishly. "I used to think lawyers were dumb."

Lottie moved out of the boarding house and into the residential hotel the next day.

Ames called her Monday morning, and said he would pick her up in front of the hotel at two. They would drive to Eileen's school, and park the car within walking distance of the bus stop. She put on her best clothes, combed the knots out of her frizzy hair, and was waiting for him, sober, at one-thirty. He congratulated her, flatteringly, and they got into his car and left.

The school was a brick fortress surrounded by a concrete playground on three sides. They parked across the street, and waited until the quiet neighborhood exploded with kids released from bondage by the three o'clock schoolbell. Lottie got nervous when she saw the stampede. "A million brats!" she said. "How'll we spot her?"

"Don't worry," Ames said.

By three-fifteen, except for the running, catcalling kids in the playground, the school street was clear. There were four passengers waiting for the Morris Avenue bus, two of them children, only one a girl.

"I see her," Lottie said, breathing hard. "The blonde one, with the pug nose. So that's Eileen!"

He pushed open the car door. "Better get going. I'll call you at the hotel in an hour to see how things are."

Lottie clutched her purse, and stepped out. She walked across the street, her eyes fixed on the blonde child standing bandy-legged near the bus sign. Her heart was pounding, and the sudden thought that she might see him in Eileen's face (him, that no-good Navy slob) made her legs weaken. Then she was at the girl's side, and saying, "Hello. You must be Eileen."

The child looked up, "Who are you?" she said pertly.

"I just went to work for your mother, Mrs. Bird well. I'm—I'm a governess."

"A governess? You mean, like in *Jane Eyre?*"

"What's that?" Lottie said. She glanced down the street and thought she saw the bus approaching. "Look," she said hurriedly, "you don't have to take the bus today. Your mother told me to pick you up and take you downtown. She wants to buy you some new dresses."

"Oh, you mean it? You mean it?" the girl said excitedly.

"Sure I mean it. She said to take you in a taxi downtown."

The child's eyes shone. "I've never been in a taxi. What kind of dresses is she going to buy me?"

"I don't know; that's her business. I'm just a cleaning woman."

"I thought you said you were a governess?"

"Here's a cab," Lottie said, waving her arms at a cruising taxi.

When she gave the driver the address, the girl looked at her curiously, but didn't find it too strange that her mother might be waiting at a place called the Hotel Majestic. She seemed delighted with the adventure.

But when they arrived at the hotel, the girl seemed puzzled by the entrance and lobby. "Where do you buy dresses here?" she said.

"This is my hotel," Lottie explained. "Your mother is going to call me here. She told me to wait to hear from her. Understand?"

"But why?"

"Don't ask so many questions, huh?"

Lottie sighed with relief when the hotel door closed behind them. She locked it carefully, and told the girl to make herself at home. The child was behaving well; she had a trusting nature, thank God, and spent the first half hour in roving about the small two-room suite on a tour of inspection. The magazines that Lottie provided for her amusement didn't amuse her long, and after an hour, she grew restless.

"Why doesn't my mother call?" she said. "Are you sure she knows where we are?"

"She knows."

"I'm hungry. My mother always gives me something to eat when I get home from school."

Lottie grumbled, but searched the small kitchenette. There was half a glass of milk and some stale salted biscuits. The child wrinkled her nose, but accepted the offering. Chewing slowly, she began to look sleepy. After awhile, she dozed off in the big chair near the window.

At five o'clock, the phone rang. It didn't waken the girl, but it startled Lottie. She grabbed it and heard Ames say: "Lottie?"

"And what happened to you?"

"I got tied up. Kid all right?"

"Sleeping like a baby."

"Good. I'll be there in twenty minutes, and then we'll settle the whole thing."

She hung up, and saw the child's eyes opening.

"Was that Mommy?"

"Your Mommy's on her way," Lottie smiled. "On her way!"

Half an hour later, there was a knock on the door. Lottie opened it and saw two men in the hallway. One was Ames, looking grim. The other was a stranger, looking even grimmer.

"Hey, what's this?" she said to Ames. "Who's your pal?"

The stranger took one step into the room, and removed his wallet from a hip pocket. He was a thick shouldered man, with blunt but youthful features. "Lottie Mead?" he said.

"Yeah!"

"I'm Lieutenant Bloom, Police Department. Miss Mead, you're under arrest. The charge is kidnapping."

She stared stupidly at his moving lips, then down at the opened wallet. The police identification was familiar, she'd seen it before.

"What are you talking about?" she gasped. Her eyes flew to Ames. "Phil! Tell him he's making a mistake!"

"You admit enticing this child here to your apartment?" Bloom said. "No use denying it. Miss Mead; we've got plenty witnesses."

"Sure, I did! But I had every right, didn't I, Phil? Phil!"

Ames looked toward her, but didn't answer.

She whirled on the lieutenant. "She's my own kid! I'm her mother! I had every right in the world to take her and bring her here."

"Sorry," Bloom said, shaking his head. "I can't buy that. Miss Mead. This isn't your child."

"It is, it is! I got a birth certificate to prove it. They call her Eileen Birdwell, but she's my own kid!"

The child stood up and came toward them. She touched Lottie's elbow and said: "My name's not Eileen. My name's Margaret. Can I go home now?"

Lottie stared down at the innocent face, and her own became transformed with rage. "You little liar!" she rasped. "You no-good little liar! Phil, for God's sake, will you tell him the truth!"

"What truth?" Ames said lightly. "I don't know anything."

Lottie screamed and flung herself toward him, but Bloom got between them. "I'm no kidnapper!" she cried. "Don't arrest me, please! It was all a

trick. He tricked me—”

Ames was behind her, talking in her ear.

“Joe Bloom can send you to prison for the rest of your life,” he said softly. “You know that, don’t you?”

“You tricked me! You pointed out the wrong kid!”

“Listen to me,” Ames said. “You tricked yourself. And now there’s only one way out of it. You’ve got to leave the Birdwells alone. You’ve got to let them adopt Eileen and you have to stay out of their lives for good.”

“So they sent you! They did it!”

“I sent myself, Lottie. It was all my idea. I’m their lawyer, and I’m also their friend. And Joe Bloom here, he’s my friend, too—”

“All the evidence is against you. Miss Mead,” Bloom said. “Do I make the arrest, or don’t I?”

Lottie put her head into her hands and sobbed. She produced no pity.

“Will you leave the Birdwells alone?” Ames said. “Let them adopt the kid?”

“All right,” she said. “All right.”

In the street, the girl put her small hand into the detective’s large paw. “That was fun. Daddy,” she said thoughtfully. “Maybe I can help you again sometime.”

The Last Escape

Aired: January 31, 1961

Teleplay by Henry Slesar

Directed by Paul Henreid

Starring: Keenan Wynn and Jan Sterling

They lashed the heavy braided cord about Ferlini's wrists and knotted it tightly. Of the two men the smaller was the most belligerent; he yanked and tugged until the cord seemed to bite through flesh. Grunting, they put the leg irons on his ankles, slamming the thick metal locks shut and testing their security. Finally, panting with their exertions, they stood over their victim and seemed smugly satisfied with his helplessness.

Then the woman was putting the screen in front of Ferlini's bound body. In less than a minute, it was thrown aside by Ferlini himself, the cord and the irons upraised triumphantly in his outstretched hands.

The audience of the small supper club gasped, and then exploded into tumultuous applause. Ferlini glowed at the sound of it. He was fair-skinned, almost albino, even the desert sunshine failed to alter his color, but an audience's approbation could tint his cheeks with the red flush of gratified vanity.

The two volunteers from the audience, shaking their heads and grinning sheepishly, returned to their tables and their jeering companions, and the six-piece band swung into a traveling theme. Wanda, Ferlini's wife and professional partner, moved mechanically across the floor to pick up the screen and carry it backstage. There were some catcalls and a smattering of light applause, but she knew it was only in appreciation of her bare-legged costume. She was over forty, and her face was dependent on increasing layers of theatrical makeup for its passable beauty, but her legs were still long, lithe, and without blemish.

On her way to the dressing room, Baggett stepped in front of her and displayed his soulful eyes. "Let me help," he said, putting his hand on the screen.

"It's all right," Wanda whispered. "You better not. Tommy."

"They liked him tonight, didn't they?"

She frowned, putting cracks in the thick makeup. "It's that kind of crowd," she shrugged. "They'll like you, too."

“Thanks,” Baggett, an aging crooner, said dryly.

“No, I didn’t mean it that way.” She placed the screen against a concrete wall and swayed toward him, her eyes dreamy. “You know what I think of you. Tommy. Your singing, I mean.”

“Is that all you mean?”

“I better go,” Wanda said.

When she entered the dressing room, she found her husband in a good mood, and it was the mood she liked least. He was staring into the mirror and rubbing his shoulders vigorously with a towel, his face split into a wide smile that showed every one of his large, strong teeth. “Yeah, it was good tonight, it was good,” he said happily. “I could have gotten out of steel boxes tonight, that’s how I felt. You see that little guy?” He guffawed and slammed the dressing table with his palm. “Little fella thought he was gonna fix me. You see how tight he worked the rope? I tell you, the little guys, they’re the worst. It’s a pleasure to fool ’em.”

He swung around and looked at his wife, who was staring at nothing. He made fists of his big hands and flexed his exaggerated muscles, swelling out his chest to display the incredible expansion that was so important to his art. “Look at that, hah, will you look at that? You think anybody ever take me for forty-six? What do you say?”

“You’re a Greek god,” Wanda said bitterly. “Only speaking of Greeks, we’re invited out to dinner tonight. Roscoe’s treat.”

“Ah, that Phil, he spoils my appetite,” Ferlini said, still with a grin. “You hear him talk, the escape business is dead. He should have seen that crowd tonight, that’s all I say. He’d know different.”

“He booked you in this job, didn’t he? He ought to know if it’s dead or not.” She yawned, and began to change into street clothes. Then she remembered something, and came to her husband’s dressing table, wiping at her makeup. “Listen, when we see Phil tonight, don’t start up again about that water business, huh? I’m sick of hearing about that.”

“Aah,” Ferlini said, waving his hand. “You’re gettin’ old, Wanda, that’s your trouble.”

“Look who’s talking! You’re no chicken either, Joe, and don’t forget it!”

He turned to look at her, grinning shrewdly. “I count ten new wrinkles on you since last week, sugar. You take a good look at yourself? Go on, take a look, you got a mirror.”

"Aw, go to hell."

"Go on, look!" Ferlini shouted suddenly. Then his muscular arm whipped out and caught her wrist. He bent her down toward the lighted mirror on his table, forcing her to face it. She looked up at her reflection, at the streaked orange makeup on her forehead and chin, at the age lines around her mouth, the puffy flesh beneath her eyes. She turned her head aside, and Ferlini's grip tightened cruelly.

"Stop it, Joe! For God's sake!"

"Who you callin' an old man, hah? I'm younger'n you, understand, on account of I keep in shape! Don't call me no old man, you hear me?"

"All right, all right!"

He released her, with a growl of disgust. His good mood was dissipated. Wanda, tears blurring her sight, went to the other side of the room and completed dressing.

"Not everybody thinks I'm so old," she whispered. "Not everybody, Joe."

"Shut up and get dressed. We're supposed to go to dinner, let's go to dinner. Besides," he said, standing up and slapping his flat stomach, "I want to talk to Roscoe about something. About the water trick."

Wanda said nothing.

The restaurant Roscoe had picked was just like Phil Roscoe himself: past its prime, seedy, congenial, and well-lit. Roscoe held Wanda's chair gallantly for her, but Ferlini dropped heavily into a chair, reached for a roll and tore it in half. With his mouth stuffed, he said: "Hey, you should have seen me tonight, Phil, I was the best. You tell him, Wanda, ain't it true?"

Wanda smiled weakly. "It was a good crowd."

"Good? I had three curtain calls!" Ferlini said, forgetful that he worked without curtains, and without encores. "I'm tellin' you, Phil, the escape business is comin' back with a bang. And I'm gonna be right on top when it does. Especially after we do that water routine—"

"What, again?" Phil groaned. "Look, we haven't even had a drink, and you're talking about water."

Ferlini roared with laughter, and shouted for the waiter.

For Wanda, the meal was tiresome from first course to last. Ferlini and his manager did the talking, and she had heard it all before.

“Look, Joe,” Roscoe said, “you know as well as me that times are different. Few years ago, a good press agent could ballyhoo an escape guy right onto the front page. Only Houdini’s dead, Joe, don’t forget it.”

“Sure, Houdini’s dead. Only I’m alive!” He thumped his chest. “Me, Joe Ferlini!”

“That’s one thing about you, Joe, you never had any trouble with false modesty.”

“Listen,” Ferlini grated, “what could Houdini do I can’t? I work with ropes, chains, irons. I can get out of bags, boxes, hampers, chests. I can do handcuff routines. That bolted-to-a-plank stuff. I can do that Ten Ichi Thumb Tie. I can do the straitjacket. I can do escape tricks Houdini never even *thought* of. Besides, you know he used a lot of phony trick stuff—”

“And I suppose you don’t?” Wanda snorted.

“Sure, sometimes. I mean, I got my skeleton keys and my phony bolts and the other junk. But you know me, Phil, I do my best tricks with muscle. Am I right?”

“Sure, sure,” the manager said wearily. “You’re the greatest, Joe.”

“I keep in shape, you ask Wanda here. One hour a day, I’m with the barbells. I still got a terrific chest expansion. I can do this water thing, Joe. It’ll be great!”

“But it’s been done, Joe, that’s what I’m trying to tell you. People don’t get excited about it no more.”

Ferlini made a noise of contempt. “You drink too much, Phil; your brain’s soft. Sure, it’s been done, only how many years ago? There’s a whole new generation now. Right? And the way you handle things, it could be a real big deal. What do you say?”

Roscoe sighed, and it was a sigh of surrender.

“Okay, Joe, if you really want it. How do you want to work the act?”

Ferlini beamed. “I figure I’ll do it up good. First I’ll let ’em handcuff me. Then the rope around my body, about fifty feet, and the leg-irons. Then they put me in a sack and tie it up good. Then they put the whole business in a big iron chest and dump me into Lake Truscan. How does that sound?”

“Like sudden death. How much is trick and how much is muscle?”

“The rope is muscle; I’ll just give ’em the chest expansion routine and the whole thing’ll slip right off me. I’ll have a skeleton key to the handcuffs in a double-hemmed trouser cuff. Once I get them off. I’ll take a razor and

slit the bag open. The chest'll have a phoney bottom; I push it open and swim to the surface; the whole works sink and I come up smelling like a rose." He gave Phil his victory grin.

"How good a swimmer are you?"

"The best. Don't worry about that part. When I was a kid, I wanted to go over and swim the Channel, that's how good I was."

"We could drop you by motor boat, and pick you up the same way. That'll lessen the risk."

"Sure, it's a cinch. I knew you'd see it, Phil."

"I see it," the manager said, "but I still don't like it. Hey, waiter! Where's the bourbon?"

From their apartment hotel room on the third floor, Wanda could look out of the window and see her husband stroking rapidly across the outdoor pool in the courtyard. He moved like a shark through the water, his graying hair slicked back and crinkling at the edges, the thick muscles in his back and shoulders rippling with every smooth motion of his arms. Once, fifteen years ago, she would have been rapt with admiration. Now she knew better. The great Ferlini needed only one admirer, and he saw him in the shaving mirror every day.

With a sigh, she came back into the room, sat down, and listlessly turned the pages of *Variety*. There was a timid knock on the door a few minutes later, and she called out permission to enter. When she saw Baggett in the doorway, she caught her breath in surprise and guilt.

"Tommy! What are you doing here?"

"I had to see you, Wanda. I knew Joe was in the pool, so I thought it would be a good time. Looks like he'll be there the rest of the day—"

"You're probably right."

She was flustered, but tried not to show it. She offered him a drink, but he said no. She tried to make small talk, but he wasn't interested. In the next minute, she was in his arms. But she was uncomfortable there, and soon broke from him and started to talk about her husband.

"You just don't know what he's like. Every year he gets worse, every day. All he thinks about is the act, night and day it's escape, escape, escape. Sometimes I think I'll go crazy. Tommy, I mean it. When we were in Louisville, last year, I actually went to a head-shrinker for awhile, did you

know that? For three months I went, and then he got the job in Las Vegas, so that ended that."

"If you ask me," Baggett growled, "he's the one that's crazy, treating you the way he does."

"You know he even escapes in his sleep sometimes? No kidding. He wakes up in the middle of the night, throws off the covers, and takes a bow." She laughed without a change of expression, and then the tears flowed. Baggett surrounded her in his arms again. "Sometimes I wish he'd get tied up where he can't escape. Not ever—"

"What do you mean?"

She looked up at him.

"You know the water trick, where he gets thrown in a lake? He's going to do it in a couple of weeks. You know what I've been thinking about, ever since he decided on it?"

She went to the window, looking down at the pool where Ferlini was still stubbornly plowing the water.

"I was thinking that maybe something would go wrong. He's good; I know that. He can escape from almost anything. But if one little piece of the act doesn't work right—he'd drown. Do you think I'm terrible, having a thought like that?"

"I don't blame you for a minute!" Baggett said loyally.

Moving slowly, Wanda went to the bureau and opened the second drawer. From a welter of paraphernalia, she removed a pair of steel handcuffs and two small metal objects. She brought the handcuffs to Baggett, and said:

"Do me a favor. Tommy? Put these on?"

He blinked. "You mean it?"

"Please."

He held out his wrists willingly, and she clamped them around them, pushing the lock into place.

"Now try and get out," she said.

Baggett, a thin, romantic type, strained mightily, until the blood rushed up in a crimson column on his neck.

"I can't do it!" he panted.

"Of course you can't. Nobody could, not even Ferlini, unless he happened to have this on him somewhere." She help up a small key, and

handed it over. “Now try it,” she said.

Twisting his fingers, his tongue tucked into the corner of his mouth, Baggett managed to insert the tiny key into the hole. He turned it, but nothing happened.

“It’s not working,” he said. “The key doesn’t turn.”

“No,” Wanda said dreamily. “It doesn’t, does it?”

“But why not? What’s wrong?” There was a hint of panic in Baggett’s voice.

“It’s the wrong key,” Wanda said. “That’s the problem. This is the right one.” She help up a second key, then came over and inserted it herself. The lock sprung free, and the handcuffs came off. Baggett, rubbing his wrists, looked at her questioningly.

“I think you better go now,” Wanda said.

Phil Roscoe was pleased with the results of his publicity campaign. Four local newspapers in the Denver area were touting the event, and one major news service had put it on the wire. But the great Ferlini wasn’t so easily pleased; his visions had been of television coverage, national magazines, and Hollywood offers, but these were sugarplums that Roscoe had been unable to obtain.

“For the love of mike,” Roscoe told him, “don’t expect the moon out of this. It’s not big news anymore, not since Houdini did it. Be satisfied with what you got.”

Ferlini grumbled, but was satisfied.

On the day of the event, Wanda Ferlini woke up looking older and more haggard than ever before. It had been a bad night; her husband had twice startled her out of sleep with his wild dreams of incredible escapes. But it wasn’t only sleeplessness which dulled her eyes and slowed her responses. It was anticipation, the dread of something going wrong.

Roscoe had hired a chauffer-driven, open-top Cadillac for the occasion; they drove up to the site of Ferlini’s adventure in style. Wanda, sitting beside Roscoe in the back seat of the car, wore her best dress and never looked worse. Roscoe, flushed with excitement and bourbon, held tightly to her hand. Ferlini, riding the high seat of the Cadillac, waving his arms to the crowd, wore a full dress suit with a white tie, his muscular shoulders stretching the glossy fabric almost to the point of bursting seams.

If Ferlini had any further complaints about Roscoe's publicity build-up, they were forgotten now. The crowd on the edge of Lake Truscan numbered in the hundreds. Roscoe's efforts to enlist the mayor in the program had failed, but there was a city councilman, the chief of police, the assistant fire commissioner, and two of the town's leading businessmen in attendance. The supper club had supplied the affair with its full six-piece orchestra, and their ragtime marches made the occasion seem more festive and significant than it really was. Best of all, there were a dozen newsmen and photographers.

Roscoe had planned it all well, but there were still some disappointments. The public address system developed a high-pitched squeal that made its use impossible, so there were no introductory speeches. The weather had seemed ideal in the early morning, but by one-thirty, a black-trimmed cloud have moved overhead. Wanda Ferlini shivered when she saw it. Roscoe, moving busily among the officials, tried to speed up the program before rain made Ferlini's escape attempt even more difficult.

They were ready to go at two.

The handcuffs were snapped on first, by the police chief; it seemed appropriate. The chief, a bluff man with a forced smile, examined the handcuffs carefully before placing them on Ferlini's wrists, and pronounced them thoroughly genuine.

The two businessmen were selected to wind the thick rope about Ferlini's body. He stripped off his coat jacket, his white tie, and his formal shirt, and then kicked off his shoes. In the T-shirt, his muscular chest drew admiring exclamations from the crowd's female element. The businessmen were both short and pudgy, and they were puffing by the time they had the fifty-foot rope coiled around Ferlini's body.

"Knot it, knot it!" Ferlini urged them, exposing the teeth made strong and sharp by years of tearing and biting at ropes. They knotted it, in odd, lumpy knots that accented the coil from head to foot. They were so busy that neither they nor the spectators were aware that Ferlini was pumping his lungs full of air, increasing the circumference of his chest by almost seven inches. He smiled complacently when they were through, confident that he could wriggle free of his bonds in only a few seconds.

The assistant fire commissioner was given the task of assisting Ferlini into the cloth sack. He rested it on the ground, and Ferlini was lifted over it;

then the official lifted up the cloth until it covered the escape artist completely. The crowd murmured when the cloth was securely fastened over Ferlini's head.

But it was the sight of the huge iron chest that brought the sharpest reaction from the spectators. Somewhere in the throng, a woman screamed, and Roscoe grinned with pleasure. It was great showmanship. He sought Wanda's eyes to share the moment, but he found her face pale and drawn, her own eyes closed and her lips moving soundlessly.

Then Ferlini was deposited inside the chest, and the chest was locked and bolted by the city councilman. The committee examined it, declared it escape proof, and then stood back as a quartet of hired musclemen lifted the chest from the ground and deposited it in the stern of the motor boat that was moored to the dock.

The supper club orchestra struck up the funeral march, swinging the mournful melody. Roscoe stepped into the boat first, and then helped Wanda—who looked like a bereaved widow—aboard. The pilot of the craft, a jaunty crew-cut young man, waved at the crowd and unfastened the line. He started the engine, and moved the boat slowly out toward the deep of the lake.

"You all right?" Roscoe asked the woman.

Wanda murmured something, and reached for his hand.

When there were five hundred yards off shore, the pilot cut the engine.

"This okay, Mr. Roscoe?"

"This'll do fine." Roscoe trained binoculars on the edge of the lake, to see what the newsmen were up to. They were watching him just as eagerly; the photographers, some with telescopic lenses on their cameras, were hard at work.

"Let 'er go," Roscoe said.

Wanda cried out feebly, and the pilot grinned, put his hands against the iron chest, and tipped it over the side. It fell into the water with a splash that sprayed them all, and then vanished from sight, spreading a huge ripple all the way back to the shore.

Then they waited.

Roscoe looked at his watch. When thirty seconds went by, he looked at Wanda and smiled reassuringly.

Then they waited some more.

At the end of the first minute, the pilot's grin faded, and he began to whistle off-key. Wanda shrieked at him to be quiet, and he stopped.

At the end of the second minute, Roscoe could no longer look at the terrible chalk-whiteness of Wanda's face, so he lifted his binoculars again and studied the shoreline. The crowd had pressed forward to the water's edge by now, moving like some dark, undulating animal.

"My God," the pilot said. "He's not coming up, Mr. Roscoe!"

"He's got to come up! He's got to!"

Three minutes passed, but there was no sign of the great Ferlini.

At the end of six minutes, Wanda Ferlini moaned, swayed, and fainted. Roscoe caught her falling body before it struck the floor of the boat. Five minutes later he ordered the pilot to head back for shore.

They recovered Ferlini's handcuffed body late that night.

Baggett tried to see Wanda on the day of the funeral but it was Phil Roscoe who refused him admittance. Phil didn't care about Wanda's love life; he had too many problems of his own. But he was still a businessman, and Wanda was still a client, even without her famous husband. It just didn't seem smart to have Wanda appear as anything more than a tragic widow.

Wanda was playing the role well. By some strange cosmetic alchemy, her sorrow made her look younger. Her white-powdered face and pale lipstick contrasted well with her black mourning attire.

Roscoe had made the funeral arrangements, and they were almost as spectacular as the water escape itself. The turnout was large and well-covered by the press; a horde of show people, not adverse to being seen themselves, were on hand to mourn the passing of the great escape artist. The funeral procession wound slowly through the streets of the town, requiring a full half-hour to pass any one city block, but by the time Ferlini's coffin had reached the point of no return the crowd had thinned out considerably. Only a handful watched the final ceremonies in the graveyard.

Wanda sobbed against Roscoe's shoulder, and he patted her consolingly.

"It's the way he wanted it," he said inanely.

"I know, I know," Wanda said.

The eulogy, delivered by the town's most prominent clergyman, was brief. He spoke of Ferlini's courage, of his devotion to his art, of the pleasure he had given so many people in his lifetime. As he spoke, Wanda's

eyes glazed oddly, and for a moment, Roscoe was fearful that she might swoon again.

They brought the coffin to the edge of the grave. The bearer in front, a waiter in the supper club, seemed puzzled by something, and murmured to the man beside him. Roscoe stepped forward, spoke briefly to them, and then conferred hastily with the minister. The conference piqued the curiosity of the solitary newsman on the scene, who came out of the sidelines to ask what was happening.

"I dunno," Roscoe said, scratching his head. "Freddy here thinks something is wrong. Says the coffin feels strange."

"How do you mean, strange?"

The waiter shrugged. "Light is what I mean. It feels too light."

"Really," the minister whispered. "I hardly think—"

"No, he's right," another bearer said. "Hardly weighs anything at all. And you know Ferlini, he was a big, hefty guy."

They looked at the coffin, waiting for someone to make a suggestion. It was Roscoe, finally.

"I hate to do this," he said softly. "But I think we'd better open it."

The minister protested, but they were already working on the lid.

"What's happening?" Wanda said. "What's going on, Phil?"

"Keep back," he pleaded. "I don't want you to see this, Wanda—"

But there was no way for her to avoid it. The lid was opened, and the truth was revealed to the sight of all. It sent a shock through the crowd as tangible as a blow.

The coffin was empty, and Wanda Ferlini was screaming like a high wind among the treetops.

Dr. Rushfield rolled a pencil along the blotter of the desk, and said:

"Go on, Mr. Roscoe, I want to hear it all."

Phil Roscoe licked his dry mouth and wished he had a drink.

"You've got to understand how it is in my business. Doctor. Everything is showmanship, everything. That's why Ferlini made this deal with me, maybe ten, twelve years ago."

"And just what was this deal?"

"Nobody else knew about it, just him and me. It was crazy, I told him that. But you don't know how stubborn a guy like that can be. He made me promise that if anything every happened to him, I mean if he died, that I

would arrange for one last trick—something that would make him remembered even longer than Houdini. That's what it was. Doc."

"A trick?"

"A real easy one. I just slipped the undertaker fifty bucks, and he arranged to have Ferlini buried someplace in secret. Then he put an empty coffin in the hearse, and that was that. You see what I mean, don't you? Honest-to-goodness showmanship."

"I see," Rushfield said, frowning. "But I'm afraid that it had quite an effect on Mrs. Ferlini. I gather that she wasn't too well-balanced before this happened, and now. . ." He sighed, and stood up. "All right, Mr. Roscoe. I can let you have one look at her, but I can't let you talk to her. I'm sorry."

Roscoe followed the doctor down the hall. They stopped at a door with a small barred window, and Roscoe looked inside. He drew back, appalled, at the sight of Wanda, her eyes round and unseeing, her arms straining uselessly to escape from the tight, unrelenting grip of the straitjacket.

A Woman's Help

Aired: March 28, 1961

Teleplay by Henry Slesar

Directed by Arthur Hiller

Starring: Scott McKay

Arnold Bourdon was suffering from a progressive muscle disease, which, while debilitating and unpleasant, was neither painful nor imminently fatal. Arnold was suffering, that is, but it was his wife, Elizabeth, who had the illness. She robed herself in its symptoms like a queen, and from her bed and wheelchair ruled her subjects (Arnold, the three servants and her physician) with a tyranny that was sometimes overwhelming to Arnold's sensitive nature.

Arnold was a handsome, well-groomed man, kept younger looking than his forty-three years through vigorous exercise and the health-giving benefits of an easy, moneyed existence. All his life, he had enjoyed the help of women. His mother, while poor and widowed, had devoted herself to his early care and feeding. His sister, sacrificing her own happiness for his sake, had supported him during his matriculation at one of the better Eastern colleges. Then he had met Elizabeth, who was rich, and partial to handsome, sensitive men.

Arnold's every feature was sensitive. His eyes were a tender blue. His nose was aristocratic. His lips fine and delicate. But most sensitive of all were his ears. Shrill complaining voices gave him headaches. The sound of petulant sobs was painful. The creak-creak of a wheelchair scuddling overhead caused him to grit his teeth. But most of all, the clangor of a bedside bell, summoning him to the royal invalid presence, was excruciating agony.

When the bell sounded on Monday morning in late February, Arnold was in the kitchen supervising the precise timing of Elizabeth's two-and-a-half minute egg. The pale blue eyes crinkled, the delicate mouth winced, and the elongated fingers closed about the handle of a butterknife in an oddly ferocious manner. He picked up the breakfast tray and carried it up the stairway to the second floor, trying to take comfort from the fact that he was performing the chore for the last time.

Elizabeth was sitting upright in bed when he entered. There was a satiny blue bolster behind her back, and magenta pillows behind her head. The background was all wrong for Elizabeth's graying hair and yellow skin. She had never been a pretty woman; now she was barely presentable. Arnold, as both esthete and husband, found her difficult to look upon.

"You certainly took your time," she grumbled, smoothing the sheet over her lap. "If this woman you hired doesn't do any better. I'll probably starve to death one of these days. Well put it down, put it down!"

Arnold put the wicker tray in front of her, and glanced at her watch. "It's almost nine now. Her train will be here in ten minutes; perhaps I should start for the station."

"You seem awfully anxious," she said.

"I just don't want Miss Grecco to feel lost. You know that Hillfield station. I could send Ralph, of course, if you'd rather I stayed with you."

"Go ahead, go ahead," she said testily. "I'm anxious to meet your Miss Grecco. I suppose she's some frittery blonde with ten thumbs and a bad permanent."

"I'm sure she'll be fine. The employment service recommended her highly, and you saw her references. You need a woman's care, Elizabeth, you've said so yourself."

"Oh, stop yammering and go." She tapped the top of her egg violently with the back of a spoon. "And send her right up; I want a look at this creature."

The train, as usual, was late. Arnold, waiting at the wheel of the small foreign car that Elizabeth had given him on their anniversary, drummed his fingers impatiently on the dashboard. When the 9:05 lumbered into the suburban station at 9:15, only three passengers got off. Two were men; the other was a trim-figured young woman with a slouchy feathered hat covering her face. A conductor assisted her with the three shabby suitcases which accompanied her. Arnold couldn't determine much about her appearance from the distance, but he could see instantly that Miss Grecco had superb legs. Superb. He patted his thin, iron-gray mustache with one finger.

As he left the car to assist her, he saw that under her overcoat she wore a severe tweed suit that Elizabeth would have called Early Garbo. Something about the mannishness of the attire and the excellence of the legs made the

woman's figure provocative. Arnold found himself anxious to see what was under the concealing hat.

"Hello," he said pleasantly. "I'm Arnold Bourdon, and I suppose you're Miss Grecco. Sorry about the train, but our service here isn't the best in the world."

She looked up from the feathery brim. She wore absolutely no make-up. If she had, if there had been crimson on her lips and blue on her eyelids, she would have been altogether too voluptuous an entry into the Bourdon household. As it was. Miss Grecco was a remarkably pretty woman, and Arnold experienced a tremor of doubt concerning his wife's reaction.

"I hope you'll be happy here," he said, smiling charmingly. "My wife's needed some female attention for some time, someone who can take care of her needs better than I. You understand about her ailment, I trust?"

"Yes, it was explained to me," Miss Grecco said shyly. "I've done practical nursing before, but I understand that your wife needs more of a—companion."

"You might say that. She requires all sorts of little attentions in addition to her medical care; you know how women are." He glanced at her briefly. "I certainly hope you'll like us. Miss Grecco."

"I'm sure I will," she murmured.

Arnold found Miss Grecco's interview with Elizabeth as anxiety-ridden as childbirth. In the living room, he paced the floor like an expectant father, waiting for the bedroom door to open on the second floor. When it did. Miss Grecco came downstairs on her remarkable legs, and her pale cheeks were flushed with the natural cosmetic of emotion. He questioned her briefly, but she offered nothing more than the information that his wife wished to see him upstairs.

Elizabeth was a thundercloud when he entered. She crossed over the lace bedjacket.

"Well, where did you get her?" she asked bitterly. "From the Folies Bergere?"

"Elizabeth, really—"

"That getup didn't fool me for a minute. I suppose you think you were being clever, don't you?"

"Nothing of the sort. You chose Miss Grecco yourself, from three resumes sent by the employment service. I've never seen the woman before

today."

"But you admit she's pretty?"

"Miss Grecco's attractive, yes. But not pretty, no."

Elizabeth laughed briefly. Then she lowered her reading glasses and hid the intensity of her eyes. "Very well, we'll let her stay. It should be interesting watching you two. But make no mistake about it, Arnold. I'll be watching."

"Really, you're talking nonsense."

"I know you, Arnold, I know you inside out. I can hear your little romantic heart beating all the way over here."

"Elizabeth, please—"

"Well, go ahead, tell Miss Grecco that she's hired. No, never mind. I'll tell her myself." She picked up the bedside bell and rang it violently. The insistent clanging made Arnold grimace, but she didn't stop until Miss Grecco realized the summons was for her.

"Yes, Mrs. Bourdon?" Miss Grecco said, appearing in the doorway.

"I want to be wheeled outdoors this morning," Elizabeth said. "I'll need your help. Then I wish you'd see about Arnold's lunch; our cook has a tendency to fry everything, and Arnold has a delicate stomach. You see," she said slyly, "I'm not the only one here who needs attention. My husband deserves some, too."

"Yes, Mrs. Bourdon," Miss Grecco said, glancing at Arnold with a hint of panic in her lovely violet eyes.

It was two months before he kissed her. It had been a trying two months, in which Elizabeth's clanging bell had ripped through the house incessantly; not so much a summons as a warning. She was jealous, and she was enjoying her jealousy with a strange perverse pleasure. She hinted constantly about their burgeoning romance, and chuckled when the color rose in Miss Greece's alabaster cheeks. To Arnold, she did more than hint—she accused. Eventually, as if weary of being damned for a crime he wasn't committing, Arnold kissed Miss Grecco.

It happened in the Bourdon kitchen, at midnight. Miss Grecco had come downstairs for a solitary cup of hot chocolate. When Arnold came in, he said nothing. Miss Grecco, in her housecoat, was especially feminine. Her auburn hair, normally tight-combed and pinned, was loose over her shoulders.

“Would you like some hot chocolate?” she whispered.

“Yes, thank you,” Arnold said. Then he took her in his arms.

Half an hour later. Miss Grecco put her head on his shoulder and said:

“I love you, Arnold.”

“I love you, too.”

She sighed. “But it’s hopeless, isn’t it?”

“That depends on what you mean by hopeless.”

“Why, I mean marriage, of course.”

“Oh.”

“That is what you meant, isn’t it?”

“It would be, ordinarily,” Arnold said ruefully. “But as you know. I’m well married.”

“There are divorce courts.”

“There are poorhouses, too.”

Miss Grecco pulled away from him. “Then that’s all there is to it, I suppose.”

“We can’t admit that—”

“What else can there be? I won’t be a back street wife, Arnold.”

“That’s a dreadful, romance-novel phrase. I prefer—lover.”

“And I prefer—husband.”

Now Arnold sighed.

They sat three feet apart at the kitchen table, their hands closed about the empty mugs of hot chocolate, waiting for an idea to occur. The thoughts that were finally expressed were no newcomers to either of them, especially Arnold.

“You know about the pentathalymine?” he said.

“That medicine I give her every night?”

“Yes.”

“I know that it’s a strong sedative. She’s often so uncomfortable at night; it helps her.”

“You know about the proper dosage, and all that?”

“I know that it’s dangerous, that an overdose could affect the brain, possibly cause hemorrhaging.”

“Naturally, you wouldn’t make any mistakes about overdosing.”

“Of course not.”

“That would be foolish,” Arnold said thoughtfully.

“Yes, it would,” Miss Grecco said. “So easily detectable.”

“However, isn’t it true that an overdose wouldn’t be detected if administered a bit at a time? That is, one extra c.c. per night would have the same effect, only not immediately.”

“Yes, I believe that’s true.”

“She would become weaker every day.”

“Nauseated. That’s sure to be a symptom.”

“Yes, but not necessarily ascribable to the drug. The difference in the bottle would be hardly discernible. How long do you think it would take before she—?”

“I’m not really sure.”

“Just guess.”

“Perhaps two months,” Miss Grecco said.

“Why, that would be June,” Arnold Bourdon said, smiling sentimentally.

When Dr. Ivey was called in two weeks later, he spent an hour behind the closed door of Elizabeth’s bedroom, and emerged looking puzzled and unhappy. He asked to see Arnold privately, and being a man of integrity, admitted that he wasn’t sure of the cause of Elizabeth’s trouble.

“These nausea attacks she’s been getting,” he said. “They’re not usual in such cases, and yet I can’t seem to locate any other reason. She’s extremely weak, but that’s understandable, and her blood pressure is higher than it should be.”

“Is there anything you can do for her?” Arnold said, sympathetically.

“I’ve told her to keep to her bed for the rest of the week; perhaps she’s been overtiring herself lately. Also. . .” He paused and looked embarrassed. “Well, her mental state isn’t exactly wholesome. She seems to have some strange notions about. . .well, about your Miss Grecco.”

“What sort of notions?”

“Your wife’s an imaginative woman. Confined the way she is, her mind is free to think up all sorts of things. You know what I mean.”

“Miss Grecco has been absolutely loyal,” Arnold said. “I’m sure that Elizabeth would admit that herself. Frankly, I don’t see how we got along without her before.”

“Er, yes. Well, it’s something to be aware of, anyway. If you need me again before my regular visit next month, Mr. Bourdon, don’t hesitate to

call."

Arnold did call, four days later. Elizabeth had fainted suddenly while being wheeled about the garden. Miss Grecco did all the right things. She loosened her employer's clothes, held her head between her knees, and soon restored her to her senses. Dr. Ivey, arriving an hour later, complimented her on her prompt action, and suggested that she might wish to undertake a course of study as a registered nurse. Miss Grecco demurred, saying she had other plans for her future.

A week later, Elizabeth herself demanded the doctor's presence. She threatened to throw him off the case if he didn't improve her health, and worked herself into such a state that she was sick on her best oriental carpet in the living room.

"Nerves," the doctor told Arnold. "The woman is a bundle of them. You'll have to watch her very carefully, Mr. Bourdon; if her condition is no better by the end of the week, I think we should have her in the hospital for observation."

Arnold's blue eyes widened at the ominous statement.

"You can't," he stammered. "I mean, Elizabeth would never consent to it."

"She'll have to," Dr. Ivey said firmly. "I won't answer for the consequences if she doesn't."

That night, Arnold reported the threat to Miss Grecco. They had a serious decision to make over their midnight hot chocolate. If Elizabeth's condition was brought to the attention of probing clinical eyes, the overdose of sedative accumulating in her system might be detected.

"We could do this two ways," he said thoughtfully. "Either we could ease up on the amount we give her. . ."

"I've thought of that," Miss Grecco said.

"Or. . ."

"I've thought of that, too," Miss Grecco said.

They moved into each other's arms, with the easy grace of practiced lovers. They remained there for some five minutes, with Arnold murmuring into her ear and placing dry little kisses on the white column of her neck. It was like all the other nights of their romance, sweetened by affection, spiced by danger. Only this time the moment became different. Arnold was aware of it first; his back stiffened, and he sniffed the air. Miss Greece's

eyes rounded, and then she looked over his shoulder at the doorway of the kitchen. She made a gasping sound, and Arnold spun her about, as if for a shield, and saw for himself the apparition that had intruded.

It was Elizabeth, in her night clothes. White faced, spectral in the dim light, her hands skeletal on the doorframe, her eyes like glowing charcoal.

"Don't let me interrupt," she said, feebly, but with venom. "Go right on with it, Arnold."

"Elizabeth, you shouldn't have come down here—"

"I couldn't find the bell. That damn fool doctor put my bell somewhere. I had to walk down here." She forced herself to smile; her teeth were like tiny tombstones. "But I'm glad I did. I wouldn't have missed this for all the world, Arnold, this pretty picture."

"Oh, Mrs. Bourdon," Miss Grecco sobbed. "Oh, you mustn't think that —"

"Quiet, you! I've had enough of you. Understand that, Arnold? Quite enough!"

"You're mistaken, you know," Arnold said stoutly. "Miss Grecco merely has something in her eyes."

"I know," Elizabeth said. "You. But this is one woman you won't lean on again, Arnold. I want her out of here. Tomorrow!"

Miss Grecco started to plead.

"That won't do any good!" Elizabeth said. "You're fired. Miss Grecco. If Arnold were my employee instead of my husband. I'd fire him, too. But he is my husband. Understand? My husband."

Miss Grecco turned and fled. Arnold, helpless, listened to the rapid thumping of her low heels as she went up the carpeted stairway.

"Now you can help me," Elizabeth said, fatigued but with triumph. "You can carry me upstairs, Arnold. And tomorrow, you will call the employment agency and see about a substitute for Miss Grecco. Only this time. I'll interview our candidates, personally."

"Yes, Elizabeth," Arnold said.

Ralph, the chauffeur, drove Miss Grecco to the station the next afternoon. She left the house in the tweed suit in which she had arrived, the slouchy feathered hat pulled down over her red-rimmed eyes. She didn't look back at Arnold, who watched her departure through the living room window, his own expression pained and hopeless. It wasn't merely a lover

that was being taken from him; it was a rescuer. As he watched her climb into the front seat of the car, he knew that Miss Greece's appeal had been only partly romantic; that her help and understanding, her talented handling of the sedative that would someday release him from Elizabeth, were even more important than the attractive legs and pretty face. With a sigh, he turned from the window and saw Elizabeth in her wheelchair, watching him.

"Poor Arnold," she said, smiling maliciously. "There's always been a woman to help you, hasn't there? Only now she's gone, and you'll have to depend upon me. Poor, sick little me." She pushed the chair closer. "Have you done what I told you? Did you call the employment office?"

"Yes," he said wearily. "You'll have three candidates to choose from this afternoon. They've been instructed to arrive at alternate hours, beginning at two."

"Good."

"I think I'll go out to a movie," Arnold said, "if you don't think you'll need me."

"Go ahead," Elizabeth chuckled. "See a good romantic movie, Arnold, full of passion and pretty girls. Get it out of your system, Arnold, get it out for good."

She wheeled about sharply, and left him alone.

He returned home at five. From the moment the front door closed behind him, the bell began clanging upstairs. He threw his overcoat on the back of the sofa, and trudged up the steps. Elizabeth was in bed, tying her hair with paper curlers. She was almost affable.

"It's all settled, Arnold. I've found the perfect woman."

"I'm glad, Elizabeth. Did they all show up on time?"

"The first two were impossible," she said slyly. "They were so young. You know how you are around young women, Arnold. But I'm sure you'll find the one I've hired most attractive. In a mature way. She's in the kitchen now. Why don't you go down there, and—look her over?" She giggled.

"You seem to find it amusing."

"Amusing? Why should I? Go down there, Arnold, give her the once-over. You might like her a great deal. Perhaps even more than you liked Miss Greece. Go on!"

He frowned, and went out the door.

In the kitchen, the small, fat, dumpling of a woman was at the stove, watching a percolator. She turned when Arnold entered. She was in her mid-sixties, with stringy white hair, three chins and red cheeks.

"Does she want me?" she whispered. "Your Missus? I was just making some coffee."

Clang! Clang! went the bell above. Arnold, angrily, went to the stairway and looked up. His wife was in the doorway of her bedroom. "How do you like her?" Elizabeth shouted. "How do you like your new dream girl, Arnold?" She laughed wildly, and slammed the door.

Flushing, Arnold went back to the kitchen.

"My wife gets her sedative at nine o'clock," he said crisply. "You won't forget it?"

"No, of course not," the woman said. "You look pale. You don't look well at all."

"You understand about the dosage?"

"Yes, I understand. Just one c.c. above normal."

"That's right. It shouldn't take long to finish her off now. God knows what's kept her going this long." He patted the red cheek affectionately. "I certainly appreciate this, mother."

She simpered happily, and went to answer the clanging bell on the second floor.

Coming Home

(published title: “You Can’t Blame Me”)

Aired: June 13, 1961

Teleplay by Henry Slesar

Directed by Alf Kjellin

Starring: Jeanette Nolan and Crahan Denton

Now it was Beggs’s turn. A generation had grown to manhood since he went behind the gates, and now they were opening for him. As he stood in the warden’s office, his skin itching in civilian tweed, he thought, first twenty-year-old I see. I’ll go up to him and say, kid. I’m one guy you never laid eyes on before. I’m one guy you can’t blame for anything, because’ve been sitting out your lifetime. Twenty years!

“Fifty’s not old,” the warden said. “Plenty of men get new careers at fifty, Beggs. Don’t go getting discouraged, because you know what that leads to.”

“What?” Beggs said dreamily, knowing the answer, only wanting to keep the talk going, to delay the moment.

“You know. Trouble. You wouldn’t be the first I’ve said goodbye to one day and hello the next.” He cleared his throat and shuffled papers. “I see you have a family.”

“Had,” Beggs said, not with bitterness.

“Your wife wasn’t much for visiting, was she?”

“No.”

“That money you stole—”

“What money?”

“All right,” the Warden sighed. “I remember now. You’re one of the innocent ones. Well, fine. That’s the kind I like to see leave.” The hand was out. “Good luck, Beggs. I hope you find what you want out there. Only wish I had some good advice for you.”

“That’s all right, warden. Thanks just the same.”

“I’ll give you one tip.” He smiled benignly. “Dye your hair.”

“Thanks,” Beggs.

He was out. He knew Edith wouldn’t be waiting on the other side of the wall, but he stopped and looked up and down and sat on a hydrant to smoke a cigarette within ten yards of the prison gates. He heard a guard chuckle on

the catwalk overhead. Then he got up, and walked to the bus stop. He sat in the rear seat of the bus and watched his white-haired reflection all the way into town. I'm an old man, he thought. But that's all right.

He used up most of the rehabilitation money in two days. Some went for shelter, for new clothes, for food, and for train fare. When he stepped onto the platform at Purdy's Landing, a taxi man solicited his business. He said yes, and got into the front seat. "Do you know the Cobbin farm?" he said.

"Nope," the cabdriver said. "Never heard of it."

"Used to be on Edge Road?"

"Heard of Edge Road."

"That's where I want to go. I'll tell you where to stop."

He told him, within sight of a small housing development. He paid the man, but waited until he was driving off before he approached one of the houses. When the car was out of sight, he turned out of the driveway and started walking down the road. Nothing seemed familiar, but he wasn't worried. Everything changes. Latitudes remain. Stone endures.

He saw the jagged rim of the rocky slope ahead of him, and he knew he was in the right place. He slid down the small embankment, bracing himself against a fall. He had been nimbler twenty years ago. There was a steep woodland at the end of the slope, and he entered the thick of it. He stumbled around until he saw the rough circle of stacked stones, the old blackened tree stump, and the spot where he had hidden the money.

He began removing the stones. There were many of them. He had no fear that his hiding pace had been discovered in his absence. His confidence was as strong as faith.

It was there, still in the leather suitcase, all in cash, neatly bundled up by denomination, slightly damp but still new-looking and spendable. He wiped off the suitcase—it had cost $40.00, new—and clucked when he saw the mold damage on its edges. But it was sturdy still, and hefted well by its stout handle.

He returned to the road, carrying the suitcase. This time, he did stop at one of the houses, and knocked on the door. A woman answered, looking dubiously at his suitcase as if expecting a sales pitch, and then relaxed when she saw his snowy hair and heard his question. Could he have a drink of water? Of course. Could he please call a taxi? Go ahead, phone's right over

there. She was a nice woman, not young. With a shock, Beggs remembered that Edith would be the same age now.

He reached the old neighborhood at dusk. The light dab of rouge on the tenements didn't improve their appearance; it was like makeup on a trollop. Not much change here, he thought, only for the worse. Dilapidation and decay, another twenty-year layer of dirt on the pavements and building stones. Then he saw the differences: an all-glass front on the corner drugstore; an empty lot where a candy warehouse had been; a change of nationality in the street urchins; a new sign, neon, in front of Mike's Bar and Grill. The sign read "Lucky's," and when it blinked, the "L" fizzled and crackled and seemed ready to burn out.

He went into the bar. He had spent plenty of hours there in his youth, even after his marriage. But only the latitude and longitude was the same. Mike's place had been rough-furnished, honestly lit, and the bartender had had sweat on his forearms. Lucky's was another sort of place altogether. It was dark, too dark for an old pair of eyes, jeweled up with chrome and colored glass, a lousy cocktail lounge. There were even women: he saw a black dress and a string of pearls and heard hard, feminine laughter. The bartender wore a white uniform and had a ferret's face. He played the cash register like a Hammond organ.

"Yes, sir?" the barman said.

"Phone?" Beggs said hoarsely.

Contempt. "Back there."

He stumbled on something, righted himself, found the phone booth. He searched clumsily through the directory, marveling at its thickness, the smell of alcohol around him almost strong enough to make his head spin; there hadn't been whiskey past his throat in two decades. He found her listing, BEGGS, EDITH, the number different but the address the same. He felt almost weepy with gratitude towards his wife, for being stubborn and changeless.

He went into the booth, forcing the suitcase in between his legs, dug a dime out of his pocket and then saw that rates were different. He found a quarter, but he didn't deposit it. His hands were shaking too much. He couldn't face the moment, couldn't sit here in this glass cell and hear the voice from yesterday tinny and disembodied in the receiver. He came out of the booth, sweating.

At the bar, he sat on a plush stool and placed his elbows on the bar and rested his head in his hands. There was nobody drinking. The barman moved on him like a bird of prey. “What’ll it be?” he said seductively. “You look like you need one, friend.”

Beggs looked up. “Whatever happened to Mike?” he said.

“Who?”

“I’ll—I’ll have a whiskey.”

The glass was in front of him, paid for, easing the strain between them. The barman relaxed and said; “You mean Mike Duram? Used to be his bar once?”

“Yes.”

“Six feet under,” the man said, jerking his thumb downwards. “Maybe ten years ago. Place had four owners since then. You a friend of Mike’s or something?”

“I knew him,” Beggs said. “A long time ago.” He downed the drink and it exploded in his head like a grenade. He coughed, choked, almost fell forward on the mahogany counter. The bartender cursed and got him water.

“What are you, a wise guy?” he said. “Tryin’ to make out my whiskey’s no good?”

“I’m sorry; it’s been a long time.”

“Yeah, don’t give me that.”

He walked off, injured. Beggs covered his face with his hand. Then he felt a touch in the middle of his back, and turned to see the cheap deadwhite pearls and the slim throat severed by a low black neckline.

“Hello, Pop, you got a cold or something?”

“It’s nothing,” he said. She came and sat on the opposite stool, a young, pale, pretty girl, her skin even whiter than the fake necklace she wore. “I’m not used to it,” he said. “Can’t take the stuff anymore.”

“You need practice,” she smiled. Then he realized that this wasn’t amateur cordiality; the girl worked there. He reached for the suitcase handle. “Stick around. Pop, you can’t fly on one wing.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Have another drink. It’ll taste better this time.”

“I don’t think so.”

“I’ll tell you what. You buy one and try it; if you don’t like it. I’ll finish it for you. It’s like a moneyback guarantee, only you don’t get your money

back.” She laughed gayly.

He started to refuse, but he hated to see even the false smile disappear. “All right,” he said gruffly.

The bartender returned, all prepared. He set two shot glasses in front of them, and filled both to the rim. He placed the bottle in front of Beggs, turning it to display the brand name. Beggs, chastised, gave him a small grin. The girl’s thin white fingers closed around her glass, and she lifted it. “Here’s to you,” she said.

The second went down easier. It didn’t relax him, but it made his depression easier to bear. It made him remember what a drink was for. He looked shyly at the girl, and she patted his shoulder. “Nice man,” she said, cute, patronizing. “Such nice white hair.”

“You’re not drinking,” he said.

“Come to think of it. I’d like mine with ginger ale. Couldn’t we sit at a table?”

Beggs looked to the end of the bar; the bartender was wiping glasses and appeared contented.

“Sure, why not?” he said. He picked up the suitcase and climbed off the stool. His foot didn’t feel the ground when he touched it, and he laughed. “Hey, what’s going on here? My foot’s asleep.”

She giggled, and looked at the suitcase. Then she put her arm through his. “Gee, you’re cute,” she said. “I’m glad you came in.”

He was in the prison shop, the machines roaring, his body stiff with fatigue, his head hurting. He rested it on the cool surface of the lathe, and the guard gripped his shoulder, shook it. “Wake up, buddy.”

“What?” Beggs said, lifting his head from the micarta tabletop. His hand was still around a glass, but the glass was empty. “What did you say?” he said.

“Wake up,” the bartender grumbled. “This ain’t a hotel. I got to close up.”

“What time is it?” He straightened and gongs rang in his ears. His fingertips were tingling and there was glue in his mouth. “I must have fallen asleep,” he said.

“It’s after one,” the bartender said. “Go on home.”

Beggs looked at the other side of the booth. It was empty. He reached down for the suitcase handle and clutched air. “My suitcase,” he said

calmly.

"Your what?"

"Suitcase. Maybe I left it at the bar." He got up, stumbled toward the stools and started pushing them around. "Got to be here someplace," he said. "Didn't you see it?"

"Look, buddy—"

"My suitcase," Beggs said distinctly, facing the man. "I want my suitcase, you understand?"

"I didn't see any suitcase. Listen, you accusing me of—"

"The girl I was with. The one who worked here."

"No girl works here, fella. You got the wrong idea the kind of place I run."

Beggs put his hand on the man's lapel, not rough. "Please don't fool around," he said. He even smiled. "Look, don't joke. I'm an old man. See my white hair? What did you do with it? Where's the girl?"

"Mister, I'll tell you this once more." The barman plucked off his fingers. "I didn't see your lousy suitcase. And no girl works here. If you got rolled by somebody, that's your business, not mine."

"You *liar!*"

Beggs hurled himself forward. It wasn't an attack; his arms were spread out in pleading, not violence. He shouted at the man again and the man walked away, disdainful. He followed him, and the man turned and said nasty words. Then Beggs started to sob, and the bartender sighed wearily and said, "Oh, that did it, that's too much." He grabbed Beggs's arm and began propelling him to the doorway. He scooped up his overcoat from the rack and threw it at him. Beggs shouted, but he kept moving. At the door, the barman gave one final shove that sent him into the street. The door slammed shut and Beggs pounded it with his fist, only once.

Then he stood on the sidewalk, and put on his overcoat. There were cigarettes in the pocket, but they were crushed and worthless. He threw the crumpled pack into the gutter.

Then he walked off.

He remembered the stairs. There were three flights of them, easy to take when he had been young and new-married and Edith was waiting for him upstairs. Steep when he had been drinking at Mike's after a jobless day.

Now they were endless, a wooden everest. He was puffing by the time he reached the apartment door.

He knocked, and in a little while a woman who could have been Edith's mother opened the door. But it was Edith. She stared at him, pushing back the limp yellow-gray strands from her face, a bony hand fumbling with the dangling button of a soiled housecoat. He wasn't sure if she recognized him, so he said, "It's Harry, Edith."

"Harry?"

"It's kind of late," he mumbled. "I'm sorry to come so late. They let me out today. Could I come in, maybe?"

"Oh, my God," Edith said, putting her hands flat over her eyes. She didn't move for almost thirty seconds. He didn't know whether to touch her or not. He shifted from one foot to another, and licked his lips dryly.

"I'm awful thirsty," he said. "Could I have a glass of water?"

She let him in. The room was in darkness; so his wife lit a table lamp. She went into the kitchen and came out with the water. She brought it to him, and he sat down before drinking it.

When he handed her the empty glass, he smiled shyly and said, "Thanks. I sure was thirsty."

"What do you want, Harry?"

"Nothing," he said quietly. "Only a glass of water. I couldn't expect nothing else from you, could I?"

She walked away from him, fooling with her hair. "My God, I look terrible. Why couldn't you give me some warning?"

"I'm sorry, Edith," he said. "I better get going."

"Where to?"

"I don't know," Beggs said. "I haven't thought about it."

"You got no place to go?"

"No."

She took the empty glass to the kitchen, and then came out. She remained in the doorway, folding her arms and leaning against the doorframe.

"You could stay here," she said flatly. "I couldn't turn you out, without no place to go. I couldn't do that to a dog. You could sleep on the couch. Do you want to do that, Harry?"

He rubbed his palm over the cushion.

“This couch,” he said slowly. “I’d rather sleep on this couch than in a palace.” He looked at her, and she was crying. “Aw, Edith,” he said.

“Never mind me!”

He got up and went to her side. He put his arms around her.

“Is it okay if I stay? I mean, not just tonight?”

She nodded.

Beggs held her tighter, the embrace of a young lover. Edith must have realized how foolish it looked, because she laughed brokenly and pushed a tear off her cheek with the heel of her hand.

“My God, what am I thinking of?” she said. “Harry, you know how old I am?”

“I don’t care—”

“I’m a woman with a grown daughter. Harry, you never even saw your daughter.” She freed herself and went to a closed bedroom door.

She knocked, and her voice trembled. “Harry, you never saw Angela. She was only a baby when—Angela! Angela, wake up!”

A moment later the door opened. The blonde girl in the loose-fitting nightgown was yawning and blinking. She was pretty, but her expression was cross.

“What the heck’s going on?” she said. “What’s all the yellin’ about?”

“Angela, I want you to meet somebody. Somebody special!”

Edith clapped her hands together and looked at Beggs. Beggs was looking at the girl, smiling foolishly, in embarrassment. The smile didn’t last. Edith saw it go, and made a sound of disappointment. They looked at each other, the old man and the girl, and Angela tugged nervously at the strand of cheap dead-white pearls still around her throat.

Cop for a Day

Aired: October 31, 1961

Teleplay by Henry Slesar

Directed by Paul Henreid

Starring: Walter Matthau

They had $38,000, they couldn't spend a nickel. Davy Wyatt spread the money on the kitchen table, in neat piles, according to their various denominations, and just sat there, looking. After awhile this got on Phil Pennick's nerves.

"Cut it out, kid," the older man said. "You're just eatin' your heart out."

"Don't I know it."

Davy sighed, and swept the bills back into the neat leather briefcase. He tossed it carelessly onto his bunk, and joined it there a minute later, lying down with his fingers locked behind his head. "I'm goin' out," Phil said suddenly.

"Where to?"

"Pick up some sandwiches, maybe a newspaper. Take a little walk."

The kid's face paled. "Think it's a good idea?"

"You got a better one? Listen, we can rot in this crummy joint." Phil looked around the one-room flat that had been their prison for two days, and made a noise that didn't nearly show his full disgust. Then he grabbed for his jacket and put it on.

"It's your neck," the kid said. "Don't blame me if you get picked up. With that chick playin' footsie with the cops—"

"Shut up! If they get me, they'll have your neck in the chopper ten minutes later. So don't wish me any bad luck, pal."

Davy sat up quickly. "Hey, no kidding. Think you ought to take the chance?"

The older man smiled. The smile did nothing for the grim set of his features, merely shifted the frozen blankness, which was the result of three prison terms. He put a soft fedora on his gray head and adjusted it carefully.

"We took our chance already," he said as he opened the door. "And as far as the woman goes—you leave that up to me."

He hoisted the .38 out of his shoulder holster, checked the cartridges, and slipped it back. The gesture was so casual, so relaxed, that the kid

realized once again that he was working with a pro.

Davy swallowed hard, and said, “Sure, Phil. I’ll leave it up to you.”

The street was full of children. Phil Pennick liked children, especially around a hideout. They discouraged rash action by the police. He walked along like a man out to get the morning paper, or a pack of cigarettes, or to shoot a game of pool. Nobody looked at him twice, even though his clothes were a shade better than anybody else’s in that slum area.

Davy’s last words were stuck in his thoughts. “*I’ll leave it up to you!*” It was easy enough to reassure the kid that the old pro would work them out of trouble. Only this time, the old pro wasn’t so sure.

They had planned a pretty sound caper. Something simple, without elaborate preparations. It involved one small bank messenger, from a little colonial-style bank in Brooklyn, the kind of messenger who never seemed to tote more than a few grand around. Only they had been doubly surprised. The bank messenger had turned out to be a scrapper, and the loot had turned out to be bigger than they had ever dreamed. Now they had the money, and the little bonded errand boy had two bullets in his chest. Was he dead or alive? Phil didn’t know, and hardly cared. One more arrest and conviction, and he was as good as dead anyway. He wasn’t made to be a lifer; he’d rather be a corpse.

But they had the money. That was the important thing. In twenty years of trying, Phil Pennick had never come up with the big one.

It would have been a truly great triumph, if the cops hadn’t found their witness. They hadn’t seen the woman until it was too late. She was standing in a doorway of the side street where they had made their play. She was a honey blonde, with a figure out of 52nd Street, and a pair of sharp eyes. Her face didn’t change a bit when Phil spotted her. She just looked back, coldly, and watched the bank messenger sink to the sidewalk with his hands trying to hold back the blood. Then she had slammed the front door behind her.

The kid had wanted to go in after her, but Phil said no. The shots had been loud, and he wasn’t going to take any more chances. They had rushed into the waiting auto, and headed for the pre-arranged hideout.

Phil stopped by a newsstand. He bought some cigarettes, a couple of candy bars, and the Journal. He was reading the headlines as he walked into the tiny delicatessen adjoining. The holdup story was boxed at the bottom of the page. It didn’t tell him anything he didn’t already know. The honey

blonde had talked all right. And she was ready to identify the two men who had shot and killed the bank's errand boy. *Shot and killed*. Phil shook his head. The poor slob, he thought.

In the delicatessen, he bought four roast beef sandwiches and a half dozen cans of cold beer. Then he walked back to the apartment, thinking hard.

As soon as he came in, the kid grabbed for the newspaper. He found the story and read it avidly. When he looked up, his round young face was frightened.

"What'll we do, Phil? This woman can hang us!"

"Take it easy." He opened a beer.

"Are you kidding? Listen, one of the first things the cops'll do is go looking for you. I mean—let's face it, Phil—this is your kind of caper."

The older man frowned. "So what?"

"So what? So they'll parade you in front of this blonde, and she'll scream bloody murder. Then what happens to me?"

Phil took his gun out and began cleaning it. "I'll stop her," he promised.

"How? They probably got a million cops surrounding her. They won't take any chances. Hell no. So how can you stop her?"

"I got a plan," Phil said. "You're just going to have to trust me, kid. Okay?"

"Yeah, but—"

"I said trust me. Don't forget, Davy." He looked at his partner hard. "This wouldn't have happened at all—if you didn't have a jerky trigger finger."

They ate the sandwiches, drank the beer, and then the older man went to the leather briefcase and opened it. He lifted out a thin packet of bills and put it into his wallet.

"Hey," Davy said.

"Don't get in an uproar. I'm goin' to need a few bucks, for what I've got in mind. Until I come back. I'll trust you to take care of the rest." Phil put on his jacket again. "Don't get wild ideas, kid. Remember, you don't leave the room until I get back. And if we have any visitors—watch that itchy finger."

"Sure, Phil," the kid said.

Phil had a hard time getting a taxi. When he did, he gave the driver the Manhattan address of a garment house on lower Seventh Avenue.

There was a girl behind the frosted glass cage on the fifth floor, and she was pretty snippy.

"I want to see Marty Hirsch," Phil said.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Hirsch is in conference—"

"Don't give me that conference junk. Just pick up your little phone and tell him a good friend from Brooklyn Heights is here. He'll know who it is."

The girl's nose tilted up, but she made the call.

The man who hurried out to see Phil was short and paunchy. He was in shirtsleeves, and his sunset-colored tie was hanging loosely around his neck.

"Er, hello," he said nervously, looking toward the switchboard. "Look, Phil, suppose we can talk in the hallway? I got a customer inside."

"What's the matter, Marty? Ashamed of your friends?"

"Please, Phil!"

In the hallway, the garment man said: "Look, I told you never to come here." He wiped sweat from his face. "It doesn't look good, for both of us. We should do all our business by phone."

"You don't understand," Phil said. "I ain't got nothin' hot for you to buy. I'm out of that business, Marty."

"Oh? So what is it then?"

"I just want a little favor, Marty. For an old pal."

The small eyes narrowed. "What kind of favor?"

"You got a big uniform department. Right?"

"Yeah. So what? Army and Navy stuff. Things like that. So what do you want?"

"A uniform," Phil said easily. "That's all. A cop uniform. Only it's gotta be good."

"Now look, Phil—"

"Don't give me a hard time, Marty. We got too long a friendship. I want to play a joke on a friend of mine. You can fix me up with something, can't you?"

The garment man frowned. "I'll tell you what. I got here some stock models. Only they're not so new, and they ain't got no badges. And no gun,

you understand."

"Don't worry about that. I got the potsy. Will this uniform pass? I mean, if another cop saw it?"

"Yeah, yeah, sure. It'll pass. I'm telling you."

"Swell. Then trot it out, Marty." The man looked doubtful, so Phil added: "For the sake of a friend, huh?"

Phil walked out into the street with the large flat box under his arm, feeling that he was getting somewhere. Then he waved a cab up to the curb, and gave him the cross streets where Davy Wyatt had killed the bank messenger.

It was chancy, but worth it. He didn't know whether the blonde was cooling her high heels in a police station, or just knee-deep in cops guarding her at her own apartment house.

He knew the answer the minute he stepped out of the cab. There was a police car parked at the opposite curb, and two uniformed patrolmen were gabbing near the front entrance of the blonde's residence.

He looked up and down the street until he found what he was looking for. There was a small restaurant with a red-striped awning. He walked up to it briskly, and saw it was called: ANGIE'S. He glanced at the menu pasted to the window, then pushed the door open.

He surveyed the room, and it looked good. The men's John was in a hallway out of the main dining room, and there was a side exit that would come in handy when he made the switch in clothing.

There weren't many customers. Phil took a table near the hall, and placed his package on the opposite chair. A bored waiter took his order. After being served, Phil chewed patiently on a dish of tired spaghetti. Then he paid his check and went into the John.

He changed swiftly, in a booth. Then he put the clothes he'd taken off inside the box and tied the string tight. He pinned the badge to his shirt, and dropped the .38 into the police holster.

Leaving by the side door, he dropped the box into one of the trash cans near the exit.

Then he crossed the street nonchalantly, headed straight for the apartment house.

"Hi," he said, to the two cops out front. "You guys seen Weber?" Weber was a precinct lieutenant that Phil knew only too well.

“Weber? Hell, no. Was he supposed to be here?”

“I thought so. I’m from the Fourth Precinct. We got a call from his awhile ago. We picked up somebody last night, on a B and E; might be one of the guys you’re looking for.”

“Search me,” one of the cops said. “What do you want us to do about it?”

Phil swore. “I don’t know what to do myself. Sendin’ me on a wild goose chase. He was supposed to be here by now.”

“Can’t help you, pal.” The other cop yawned widely.

“Dame in her apartment?” Phil asked casually.

“Yeah,” the second cop answered. “Lying down.” He snickered. “I wouldn’t mind sharing the bunk.”

“Maybe I better talk to her. I got the guy’s picture. Maybe she can tell me something.”

“I dunno.” The first cop scratched his cheek. “We ain’t heard nothing about that.”

“What the hell,” the second one said. He turned to Phil. “She’s in Four E.”

“Okay,” Phil said. He started into the house. “If Weber shows up, you tell him I’m upstairs. Right?”

“Right.”

He shut the door behind him, and stood there long enough to let out a relieved sigh. Then he stepped into the automatic elevator, punched the button marked Four.

On the fourth floor, he rapped gently on the door marked E.

“Yeah?” The woman’s voice sounded tired, but not scared. “Who is it?”

“Police,” Phil said crisply. “Got a picture for you lady.”

“What kind of a picture?” Her voice was close to the doorframe.

“Guy we picked up last night. Maybe the one we’re lookin’ for.”

He could hear the chain being lifted; the door was opened. Close up, the blonde wasn’t as young or as lush as he had imagined. She was wearing a faded housecoat of some shiny material, clutching it around her waist without too much concern for the white flesh that was still revealed.

Phil stepped inside and took off his cap. “This won’t take long, lady.” He closed the door.

She turned her back on him and walked into the room. He unbuttoned the holster without hurry, and lifted the gun out. When she turned around, the gun was pointed dead center. She opened her mouth, but not a sound came out.

"One word and I shoot," Phil said evenly. He backed her against a sofa, and shot a look toward the other room. "What's in there?"

"Bedroom," she said.

"Move."

She cooperated nicely. She stretched out on the bed at his command—and smiled coyly. She must have figured he wanted something else besides her death. Then he picked up a pillow and shoved it into her stomach.

"Hold that," he said.

She held it. Then he shoved the gun up against it and squeezed the trigger. She looked surprised and angry and deceived, and then she was dead.

The sound had been well muffled, but Phil wanted to be sure. He went to the window that faced the street and looked down. The two cops were still out front, chewing the fat complacently. He smiled, slipped the gun into the holster, and went out.

The cops looked at him without too much interest.

"Well?" the first one said.

"Dames," Phil grinned. "Says she knows from nothing. Weber's gonna be awfully disappointed." He waved his hand. "I'm goin' back to the precinct. So long, guys."

They said, "So long," and resumed their gabbing.

Phil rounded the corner. There was a cab at the hack stand. He climbed into the back.

"What's up, officer?" the hackie grinned. "Lost your prowl car?"

"Don't be a wise guy." He gave him the address and settled back into a contented silence, thinking about the money.

It was dusk by the time he reached the neighborhood. He got off some four blocks from the tenement, and walked the rest of the distance. Some of the kids on the block hooted at him because of the uniform, and he grinned.

He went up the stairs feeling good. When he pushed open the door, Davy shot him once in the stomach. Phil didn't have time to make him

realize the mistake he was making before the second bullet struck him in the center of his forehead.

The Case of M.J.H.

Aired: January 23, 1962

Teleplay by Henry Slesar

Directed by Alan Crosland, Jr.

Starring: Barbara Baxley and Robert Loggia

It wasn't peace that Maude Sheridan made with the world after she reached the age of thirty-five, still unmarried; it was more of a truce. The conditions were few, but severe. She was to have a small degree of financial security, adequate health, and her job as secretary to Dr. Ernest Cowper, one of the better-known psychoanalysts in the East. Of all the conditions, the last was the most important. Seven years ago, she had answered Dr. Cowper's classified ad and been chosen over an anteroom-full of hopeful, bespectacled psych majors. She was older than she should have been for the job, and her background wasn't nearly as good as the other candidates, but the chemical reaction between her and the grave-faced, aging analyst had been excellent. He like her, and she liked him, and for seven years they had worked together, with Maude's responsibilities growing greater every day as Dr. Cowper's practice expanded. She was more assistant than secretary, and there were moments, casual moments, when he confided in her.

So Maude Sheridan coexisted with the world, and relaxed the struggle of hairbrush, comb, and lipstick, of figure exercises and diets. Until she met Jimmy French.

When they were introduced at a party, staged by an outgoing next-door neighbor, she accepted his little courtesies and playful ribbing with good grace and no hope of anything more. Even when he telephoned her the next day, she didn't catch her breath at the sound of his voice; Maude didn't feel entitled to girlish exhilaration. But she went to the movies with him, and when he held her hand, she allowed it. There was a goodnight kiss in front of her apartment door, but the touch of his lips didn't interfere with her quiet, placid dreams that night.

But he called back. And he called again. Two weeks after they met, she began looking at him carefully, wonderingly. He wasn't handsome, but he grinned likeably, and his hair was thick and black and strokeable. He wasn't tall, but there was muscular grace inside his well-made clothes. He wasn't well educated but he had a swift, natural understanding of things. He was

even cunning. She didn't like that part much, but it was true. There was fox in him.

Then she began looking at herself, long reflective moments before her mirror. She was too plump, she thought. Not bad looking at all, but she needed doing; there had been too much neglect. She started returning to beauty parlors, began the dieting, and the figure exercises. She was doing it for Jimmy French, because Jimmy liked her, truly liked her.

"I love you," Jimmy said one night.

She was so startled, she wanted to cry out.

"Love you," Jimmy repeated, bundling her in his arms. "Look, I know I'm not much. I mean, you're a zillion times smarter than I am, Maude. I never got through high school. I guess maybe you think I'm a mug or something."

"No! Oh, no," she said.

"I never thought a girl like you would ever look at me twice," he said, his rough cheek against her ear.

A few moments later, her truce with the world was shattered, but she didn't care. They sat beside each other and talked. He said a lot of things, some of them startling, but she didn't care about that either. Only later she remembered, and asked him to say them again.

"All right, now you know the worst," he said tightly, lighting a cigarette and hiding his face in the smoke. "I'm a pretty rotten guy, Maude. I was a wild kid, in hot water all the time, stealing tires, cars, even armed robbery. I'm not hiding it from you."

"But you were young," she said defensively. "You didn't know any better."

He grinned at her. "Yes, doctor," he said. "How much do you charge an hour, doctor?"

"Be serious, Jimmy."

"I am. What I mean is, I don't have any trade, Maude, nothing that could give us any kind of life. I've had four jobs in the last two years, none of them worth a damn. I'm just no good for you."

She cradled his head in her arms; he was like a child when he talked seriously, a solemn, dark-haired child. "Let me decide that, huh?"

"But you don't know how I feel. A swell girl like you, saddled with a bum like me, that wouldn't be fair. I want to connect with something first,

Maude, don't you see? Then I want you and me to get married."

It was the first time he had said "married." It was a word out of an alien dictionary. She repeated it soundlessly, and said:

"Nothing matters, Jimmy, believe me. I don't care about anything but you."

The next day, her happiness was an aura, an emanation. Even Dr. Cowper, preoccupied as ever with the dual problem of his own burdensome years and the stormy conflicts of his patients, noticed it.

"You seem pleased with yourself today, Maude."

"Not especially," she said. "I just feel like glowing a little." She flushed in embarrassment, and consulted her notes. "Mr. Harrison's coming in at ten-thirty, doctor. You wanted me to remind you about the change in his appointment time."

"Oh, yes." His face went dark again. "Poor Mr. Harrison."

"Is it—I mean, has there been any progress?" She spoke carefully, knowing the subject was delicate.

"Not much. Sometimes I feel the fault is mine, that I should have had the answers long ago. Or else made some other arrangement with the man, something that would protect him from himself." He sighed. "Send him right in, Maude; I'll be waiting."

"Yes, doctor."

Harrison was late; there was no question that the lateness was deliberate, a provocation. He was a burly, hard-breathing man in his fifties, with a collar so tight about his fleshy throat that it reddened his face. The tight collar, Maude thought, meant something; it was his way of adjusting to. . .

But she wasn't going to think about illness. She wanted to think about love, and about twelve o'clock, and about her lunch date with Jimmy.

She met him in the dimlit recesses of a restaurant too expensive for everyday. He ordered martinis for them both. She was giddy, unnaturally excited, and so happy that her ordinary face brought glances from other men. Happy, until the coffee arrived, and Jimmy said:

"I'm gong to ask you for something, Maude. Something you're not going to like."

"What is it? What's the matter, Jimmy?"

"Nothing's the matter. Only me, that's what's wrong."

“What are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about us getting married, me with my fat fifty-dollar bank account, and no prospects. I’ve been thinking so much about it. I’m sick. You know how that is? You can just think about something and get sick. My stomach’s rotten and my head hurts—”

She touched his brow. “You poor boy,” she crooned. “Why didn’t you say something? You—”

“It’s no case for aspirin, Maude. It needs a better pill than that. A money pill Maude, that’s what it needs.”

“I don’t understand.”

He leaned closer.

“Maude,” he said quietly. “I told you a lie. I told you I was a wild kid, a bad kid. That was a lie. I was just an ordinary kid. The one I described, the car-stealer, the armed robber—that’s me now, Maude. Right now.”

“Jimmy, you’re not serious—”

“Look at me, don’t I look serious? I’m telling you the truth about myself, Maude, something I never told anybody else. I’m no good. I’m a crook, and a cheap one at that—”

“I won’t let you say that!” She looked wildly about her, as if there were eavesdroppers everywhere. “You couldn’t be that, Jimmy. You couldn’t!”

His face relaxed. He took a sip of water, and made his tone of voice conversational.

“I want you to do something for me, Maude. It’s the only time I’ll ever ask you to do such a thing. Because I’m going to change. Right after it’s over. I’ll change.”

“After what’s over?”

“One more deal. Only one, so help me God. But this has got to be a good one, good enough to give us a head start. I want you to bring me the files from your office, as many as you can carry. Only the current ones, the ones that tell about the patients he’s had recently. No, don’t say anything, let me finish. I don’t want you to steal the files, Maude; I want you to borrow them. I’ll go through ’em real quick, so fast that you can have them back in the drawer in the morning. Maybe I’ll find what I’m looking for right away, maybe you’ll have to do it again, once or twice. I promise you won’t get into any trouble, Maude. Nothing’ll go wrong.”

His voice seemed thin and distant, and so did her own reply.

“What are you saying, Jimmy? Why do you want Dr. Cowper’s files? What would they do for you?”

“It’s just an idea I had last night. Maybe a good idea, a great idea. This analyst stuff, this is pretty personal, isn’t it? I mean, they have to tell the doc everything, don’t they?”

“Of course.”

“There’re no secrets from an analyst, right? That would defeat the whole purpose. So I thought, what if I could see the doc’s notes, if I could read through them.” He gulped down the rest of his water. “Your boss has a lot of rich patients, Maude. They could afford a few grand; it wouldn’t hurt them. But it would mean so much to me, to us.”

She looked at him, shaking her head, already denying him the terrible request.

“We won’t talk about it any more,” Jimmy said quickly. “Not now, Maude, not now.”

They talked about it that night, and she said no again, and cried in his arms, and swore that they didn’t need money to be happy. He didn’t argue with her, but his face was determined. For the rest of that week, her misery was a tangible, physical thing; she was out of the office two days. The next week was even worse; they had agreed not to see each other for awhile, and Maude discovered that the agreement was torture. She called him at home, and pleaded with him, humbly. He came to see her, and they had their first shouted argument, and he threatened to commit crimes even worse than the relatively clean crime of blackmail.

And the third week, Maude Sheridan agreed to bring him Dr. Cowper’s files.

It was the worst day of her life. As a business day, it wasn’t extraordinary. Dr. Cowper was in good spirits: a patient had “graduated” and he had no appointment with his most difficult case, the troubled Mr. Harrison. He asked her jocular questions about Jimmy, and she tried to smile her answers. At four o’clock, he decided to leave and suggested that she end her day early; she said no, there were letters to type, and some filing to be done. He patted her shoulder, and went out.

When he was gone, she made up her face carefully, disturbed by the pale image she saw in her compact mirror. Then she went to the file in the inner office and slid open the drawer marked CURRENT.

She took only half of the folders out, making sure to keep them in proper order. She found a large manila envelope, and placed the folders inside, sealing the flap tightly. With an instinct for efficiency, she marked the envelope: *If lost, please return to Miss Maude Sheridan, c/o Dr. Ernest Cowper, 1601 Park Avenue.* Then she closed the door, turned out the lights, and left. The entire business took less than five minutes.

She went directly to Jimmy's apartment on 12th Street, a barren, unlovely flat in a shabby brownstone. He seemed to be trying not to appear gleeful when he saw the bulky envelope in her hand, but he couldn't hide his pleasure completely. She said: "Please. Keep the files in order; they're not much more than notes, and a lot of them won't even make sense to you. Don't get them mixed up, Jimmy; it's terribly important."

"Don't I know it," he grinned. "We don't want him getting suspicious, do we?"

"That's not what I meant. They're Dr. Cowper's files; they're important to his work."

"I'm sorry," he said contritely. "I'll be careful, darling, trust me."

She went out and bought groceries at a shop on the corner, frozen steaks and french-fried potatoes. She cooked his supper for him, enjoying the domestic feeling it gave her. But Jimmy was too busy to be appreciative. When she was cleaning up in the tiny kitchen, he sprawled on the sofa with Dr. Cowper's often-cryptic notes, studying them intently until almost midnight. It was only then that he broke his silence, and with a gleeful cry.

"Here it is, this is the one!" he said. "This case marked M.J.H. Who is he, Maude? Who's the man?"

"On, no. Not that one, Jimmy."

"Who is he?"

"His name is Harrison, Martin Harrison. He's a securities analyst, something like that I—I suppose he's wealthy, all right. But he's such an unhappy man, Jimmy, don't make it worse—"

He smiled. "Doesn't sound so unhappy to me. Sounds like he's having himself a good time, with this girlfriend of his. Seventeen years old! And he's what, fifty-four?" He frowned at the expression on her face. "What's the matter. Honey? Didn't you know about it?"

"No. Dr. Cowper's talked about Mr. Harrison, but he never said anything like that. He just said that he had a serious problem—"

"He's the problem," Jimmy chuckled. "Mostly to his wife. Only she doesn't know about it yet, see? That's right here in the notes. I read just enough of them to get the picture. He's got this girlfriend, and he's worried sick about his wife finding out. But he can't quit, either, she means too much to him. Imagine, an old guy like that—"

"Stop it, Jimmy!"

"Aw, look, I know it's not pretty, Maude. But a guy like this—you really can't feel *sorry* for him, can you?"

"I do!"

He shook his head, admiringly. "You're wonderful, Maude, you know that? I guess that's why I love you so much. You'd feel sorry for a mad dog, wouldn't you?" He began replacing the papers in the file. "But this is the man, honey. The one I need. Martin J. Harrison."

He went to the telephone book, and looked eagerly through the H's. He found what he wanted, and made a note of the address on a scrap of paper taken from his wallet. Then he squared Dr. Cowper's files on the coffee table, and slipped them neatly into the large manila envelope.

"You can take these back in the morning," he said. "If you get there early, the doc'll never know they were gone. There, you see? Didn't I keep my promise? You see how easy it was?"

"Yes," Maude said miserably. "So easy."

She didn't see Jimmy on the weekend; her only contact with him was a telephone call on Saturday afternoon.

"I called Mr. H.," he said, in a contained voice. "Everything is working out, honey."

"Jimmy, please think it over—"

"I've thought about it enough, Maude. After this weekend, it'll all be over, and I'll be just what you want me to be."

"This weekend?"

He lowered his voice.

"No use putting it off. I'll meet him sometime tomorrow, when he can get away without making his wife suspicious. He's coming to make a deal. I set the price high; so he's liable to bargain. I'm ready for that. I know how to compromise. It can't miss, Maude."

She couldn't answer.

"Maude? Are you listening?"

“I’m listening, Jimmy.”

“I love you, Maude.”

Then he hung up.

When she arrived at the office Monday morning. Dr. Cowper wasn’t there. She had no explanation for the two patients who showed up for their appointments, and had to send them away with invented excuses about ill health; her call to the doctor’s home produced nothing but a ringing telephone. She went to lunch at twelve, to the same restaurant she frequented every noon, but the familiar setting seemed strange and unreal. When the waitress asked for her order, she looked at the menu and felt ill. The thought of food was impossible; she excused herself and went back to the office.

Dr. Cowper walked in after two, looking graver and even older than usual. “Is everything all right. Doctor?” she asked. “Are you feeling all right?”

He stopped at her desk, and opened his mouth as if to speak. Then he changed his mind, and sat down in the chair beside her, putting his hand over his eyes.

“What is it, doctor? What’s wrong?”

“I’ve lost a patient, Maude,” he said. “Lost him the hard way.”

“A patient? Which one?”

“My problem case. I should have known better. I should have realized he needed more help than I was able to give him. Then it might not have happened.”

“Mr. Harrison?” The name was a cold blade against her chest.

“Yes, Mr. Harrison. I knew there was a dark force in him, Maude; that it was getting closer to the surface every day. But I never expected anything like this.” He took his hand from his eyes and looked at her. “He killed a man yesterday, Maude. The police contacted me this morning, and I went to see him. He shot and killed a man who was trying to get money from him.”

“Money?” she said, in a voice expressing polite interest, her face giving nothing away.

“Yes. A blackmailer, Harrison said, a man who threatened to tell his wife about the young girl Harrison was in love with. But Harrison wasn’t going to pay; he went to see the man and brought a gun. He shot him dead,

and now the police have him. A blackmailer! God knows how he could learn such a thing. How he could have made such a mistake."

"What do you mean?" Maude Sheridan asked, in a rising voice. "What do you mean, mistake?"

"I mean there was no cause for blackmail—only the dark fantasies in the man's mind. There was no young girl, Maude; it was only Harrison's delusion; he was guilt-ridden about something that never existed. And when a blackmailer threatened him, he protected his fantasy with murder. The ultimate rationalization."

He sighed, and stood up. Then he went into his office and closed the door, unaware of what his words had done to the staring white-faced woman sitting in his anteroom.

The Test

(published title: “Thicker than Water”)

Aired: February 20, 1962

Teleplay by Henry Slesar

Directed by Boris Sagal

Starring: Brian Keith and Eduardo Ciannelli

Vernon Wedge didn’t want to see the old man. Olga, his secretary, gave Blesker a sub-zero reception, but he sat on in the attorney’s waiting room. His shoulders were rigid, his crooked fingers interlaced, his chalky face a portrait of stubbornness and determination. Finally, Vernon had to yield.

“Sit down, Mr. Blesker,” he said wearily, pointing to the leather chair in his office. “I know why you’re here; my phone’s been ringing all morning. Four newspapers, a youth worker, even a settlement house. What have you got, anyway, an organization?”

The old man looked befuddled. “Please,” he said. “I just come about my boy.”

“Yes, I read the newspapers. And I suppose you think your kid’s innocent?”

“He is!”

“Naturally. You’re his father. Have you talked to him since it happened?”

“I came from the prison this morning. They’re not treating him good. He looks skinny.”

“He’s only been in custody a few days, Mr. Blesker, I doubt if they’re starving him. Look,” Vernon said testily, “your boy is accused of knifing another kid in the street. That’s what happened. You know how many witnesses there are? You know what kind of evidence the district attorney has?”

“I know he’s innocent,” the old man said. “That’s what I know. Benjy’s a good, serious boy.”

“Sure,” Vernon frowned. “They are all good boys, Mr. Blesker, until they start running with a street pack. Then they’re something else.” He was almost shouting now. “Mr. Blesker, the State will pick an attorney for your son. You don’t need me.”

“I have money,” Blesker whispered. “The family, we all got together. I run a fuel oil business; I’m selling the big truck. I can pay what you ask, Mr. Wedge.”

“It’s not a question of money—”

“Then, it’s a question of what?” The old man was suddenly truculent. “Whether he’s guilty or not? You decided that already, Mr. Wedge? From reading the newspapers?”

Vernon couldn’t meet the challenge, it was too close to the truth. He had prejudged the case from the newspaper stories, and knew from the accounts that this was one client he could live without. His record was too good. What was worse, he had lost his last client to Ossining. Every criminal lawyer is allowed a few adverse verdicts; but two in a row?

“Mr. Blesker,” he said miserably, “will you tell me why you came here? Why did you pick me?”

“Because I heard you were good.”

“Do you know what happened in my last case?”

Obstinate: “I heard you were good, Mr. Wedge.”

“You told every reporter in town that you intended to hire me. That puts me in a very compromising position, you know that? And you, too. Know how it’ll look if I turn you down? Like I think your boy is guilty, that the case is hopeless.”

“I didn’t mean any harm,” the old man said fumblingly. “I just wanted to get the best for Benjy.” He was getting teary. “Don’t turn me down, please, Mr. Wedge.”

Vernon knew a lost cause when he saw one; perhaps he had known from the start how this interview would end. His voice softened.

“I didn’t say your boy is guilty, Mr. Blesker. All I say is that he’s got a bad case. A very bad case.”

Motionless, the old man waited.

“All right,” Vernon sighed. “I’ll think it over.”

The police blotter had Benjy Blesker’s age down as seventeen. He looked younger. The frightened eyes gave him a look of youthful bewilderment. Vernon wasn’t taken in by it; he had seen too many innocent, baby-faced, icy-hearted killers.

The boy’s cell was clean, and Benjy himself bore no marks of ill-treatment. He sat on the edge of the bunk and kneaded his hands. When

Vernon walked in, he asked him for a cigarette.

Vernon hesitated, then shrugged and offered the pack. “Why not?” he said. “If you’re old enough to be here.”

Benjy lit up and dropped a tough mask over his boyish features. “You the lawyer my old man hired?”

“That’s right. My name is Vernon Wedge.”

“When do I get out of here?”

“You don’t, not until the trial. They’ve refused bail.”

“When’s the trial?”

“Don’t rush it,” Vernon growled. “We need every minute of delay we can get. Don’t think this is going to be easy.”

Benjy leaned back, casual. “I didn’t cut that guy,” he said evenly. “I didn’t have anything to do with it.”

Vernon grunted, and pulled a sheet of handwritten notes out of his pocket.

“You admitted that you knew Kenny Tarcher?”

“Sure I knew him. We went to Manual Trades together.”

“They tell me Kenny was a member of a gang called The Aces. You ever run with them?”

“With that bunch?” Benjy sneered, and blew a column of smoke. “I was a Baron. The Barons don’t mix with those bums. You know who they take into that gang? A whole lot of—”

“Never mind,” Vernon snapped. “We can talk about your social life later. You were a Baron and Kenny was an Ace, so that made you natural enemies. You had a rumble last month, and this Kenny Tarcher beat up on you pretty good. Don’t give me any arguments about this, it’s ancient history.”

Benjy’s mouth was quivering. “Look, Mr. Wedge, we don’t have that kind of gang. You know Mr. Knapp—”

“The youth worker? I just came from him.”

“He’ll tell you about the Barons, Mr. Wedge, we’re not a bunch of hoods. We got a basketball team and everything.”

Vernon smothered a smile. “Why do you carry a knife, Benjy?”

“It’s no switchblade, Mr. Wedge. It’s more like a boy scout knife; I mean, they sell ’em all over. I use it for whittlin’ and stuff like that.”

“Whittling?” It was hard to hide the sneer. The end of Benjy’s cigarette flared, as did his temper.

“Look, whose side are you on? I didn’t stick Kenny, somebody else did! I swear I didn’t kill him!”

“Take it easy. I’m not making accusations, kid, that’s the court’s job. Now sit back and relax. I’m going over the story, from the police side, and then you can tell me where they’re wrong. Every little thing, understand?”

Benjy swallowed hard. Then he nodded.

“It was ten minutes to midnight on June 21,” Vernon said, watching him. “You and two other guys were walking down Thurmond Street; you came out of a movie house. Kenny Tarcher came out of the corner apartment building on Thurmond and Avenue C. You bumped into each other, and there was some horseplay. The next thing that happens, you and your pals start running down the street. Kenny falls down and tries to crawl to the stoop of his house. There were two people on the steps. They saw you running. They saw Kenny die, right in front of them. He had an eight-inch gash in his stomach.”

Benjy looked sick.

“Ten minutes later, the cops caught up with you in your old man’s fuel supply store on Chester Street. The knife was still in your pocket.” He paused.

“I didn’t cut him,” the boy said grimly. “All the rest of that stuff, that’s true. But I don’t know who cut Kenny.”

“Who were the other two guys with you?”

“I never saw ’em before. I met ‘em in the movies.”

“Don’t give me that!”

“What the hell do you want from me?” Benjy bellowed. “I tell you I don’t know those guys! One of them must have done it, I didn’t! When I saw he was hurt, I ran. That’s all it was!”

“You had the knife—”

“I didn’t use it!”

“That knife is Exhibit A,” the lawyer said. “You know that, don’t you? The witnesses saw you holding it—”

“Leave me alone! You ain’t here to help me!”

Vernon got up.

“I am, Benjy. The only way you can be helped, kid. I want you to cop a plea.”

“What?”

“I want you to plead guilty. Believe me, it’s the only sensible thing to do. You put this case to a jury, I swear you’ll be spending the rest of your life in a cage. Plead guilty, and the worst you’ll get is twenty years. That’s not as bad as it sounds; you’ll be eligible for parole in five.”

“I won’t do it!” Benjy screamed. “I’m innocent! I’m not goin’ to jail for something I didn’t do!”

“I’m talking sense, kid, why won’t you listen?”

“I didn’t do it! I didn’t!”

Vernon sighed. The corners of his mouth softened, and he dropped a hand on the boy’s shoulder.

“Listen,” he said gently. “I really want to help you, son.”

For a moment, Benjy was still. Then he threw off the arm of sympathy, and snarled at the attorney.

“I’m not your son! I got a father!”

Like father, like son, Vernon thought wryly, looking at the mulish mouth and marble eyes of the old man. He was sure Blesker had a softer side. Under other circumstances, he would smile and tell jokes and hum old-country tunes. Now, faced with the lawyer’s blunt advice, he was hard as a rock.

“You’ve got to talk some sense into him,” Vernon said. “He doesn’t know what’s good for him. If he pleads guilty to murder in the second degree, the judge will be lenient.”

“But he goes to prison? For something he didn’t do?”

“You’re his father, Mr. Blesker. You’re ignoring facts.”

“The facts are wrong!” Blesker put his fists on his knees and pounded them once. When he looked up again, there was a new mood in his eyes. “You tell me something, Mr. Wedge—”

“Yes?”

“You don’t like to lose cases, am I right? That’s what they say about you.”

“Is that bad?”

“If my boy pleads guilty, you don’t lose nothing. You still got your good record, right?”

“Do you think that’s my only reason?”

Blesker shrugged. “I’m only asking, Mr. Wedge. I don’t know nothing about the law.”

Unable to refute this accurate estimate of his inner thoughts, Vernon tried to summon up an angry denial and failed. He shrugged his shoulders.

“All right,” he said grudgingly. “So we plead Not Guilty. I’ll do everything I can to make it stick.”

Blesker examined his face for signs of sincerity. He seemed satisfied.

Vernon came to the courtroom on opening day with a heart as heavy as his briefcase. Surprisingly, the first day didn’t go badly. Judge Angus Dwight had been assigned to the bench. In spite of his dour look, Vernon knew him to be scrupulously fair and sneakily sentimental. Wickers, the prosecuting attorney, was a golden-haired Adonis with a theatrical delivery, a keen mind, and an appeal for the ladies. Fortunately, the impaneled jurors were men with only two exceptions, and they were women far past the age of coquetry. During the first hour. Wickers’ facetiousness in his opening remarks drew a rebuke from the judge concerning the seriousness of the affair; Vernon’s hopes lifted a notch.

But it was his only good day. On the second afternoon, Wickers called a man named Sol Bankers to the witness chair.

“Mr. Bankers,” he said smoothly, “you were present at the time of Kenneth Tarcher’s slaying, isn’t that so?”

“That’s right,” Bankers said heavily. He was a hard-breathing, bespectacled man with a red-veined nose. “I was sittin’ on the stoop, when those kids start foolin’ around. Next thing I know, one of ’em’s stumbling to the stoop, bleedin’ like a pig. He drops dead right at the feet of me and my Mrs. I was an hour gettin’ the bloodstains off my shoes.”

“Is that all you saw?”

“No, sir. I seen that boy, the one over there, runnin’ away with a knife in his hand.”

Then it was Vernon’s turn.

“Mr. Bankers, is it true your eyesight is impaired?”

“True enough. I’m sixty-two, son, wait ’til you’re my age.”

He drew a laugh and a rap of the gavel.

“It was almost midnight on a street not particularly well lit. Yet you saw a knife—” he pointed to the table where Exhibit A rested—“that knife, in

Benjamin Blesker's hand?"

"It was sort of flashin' in the light, if you know what I mean. But to tell you the truth, I wouldn't have noticed if Mrs. Banker hadn't said, 'look at that boy, he's got a knife!'"

The crowd buzzed, and Vernon frowned at the inadvertent hearsay testimony. The damage was done; he didn't even bother to voice a complaint.

Mrs. Banker testified next; there was nothing wrong with her eyes, she said stoutly, and she knew a knife when she saw one. It was the third witness who did the most harm. He was Marty Knapp, a dedicated youth worker serving the neighborhood.

"No, Benjy isn't a bad kid," he said thoughtfully. "But he had a temper. And he never forgave Kenny Tarcher for the beating he gave him."

"Then in your opinion," Wickers said triumphantly, "this might have been a grudge killing? Not just a sudden scuffle or unplanned assault, but a deliberate, cold-blooded—"

Vernon was on his feet, shouting objections. Judge Dwight took his side at once, but the impression was indelible in the collective mind of the jury. When Vernon sat down again, he felt as forlorn as Benjy Blesker looked.

On the eve of the fourth day, he went to see him.

"What do you say, Benjy?" he said quietly. "You see the way things are going? I'm pulling out the whole bag of tricks, and I'm not fooling anybody."

"Try harder!" Benjy snapped.

"If I knew how to work miracles, I'd work one. Look, this State doesn't like to hang kids, but it's happened before—"

"Hang?" the boy said incredulously. "You're crazy!"

"Even if you got life, know what that means? Even if you got paroled in twenty years, you'll be thirty-seven years old, almost middle-aged, with a record."

There were tears flooding Benjy's eyes. It was the first sign of a crumpling defense, and the lawyer moved in swiftly.

"Plead guilty," he said earnestly. "Plead guilty, Benjy. It's not too late."

The boy's head snapped up.

"No!" he screamed. "I didn't do it!"

The fourth day was the worst of all. Vernon railed mercilessly at the prosecution witnesses. He called Bankers a weak-eyed, boozing liar. He forced Mrs. Bankers to admit that she hated the neighborhood kids, and the Barons especially. He got Knapp, the youth worker, to recite every detail of Benjy's good record. But through it all, the jury shifted restlessly, bored, irritated, obviously unimpressed by the "character" testimony, eager only for facts, the bloodier the better.

Wickers gave them what they wanted. Wickers treated them to a blow-by-blow reenactment of the stabbing. He bled for them. He clutched his stomach. He put the victim's mother on the stand. He let her cry through ten minutes of pointless testimony, until even Judge Dwight got sick of the spectacle. But it was working. Vernon, jury-smart, knew it was working.

The trial was almost over. Wickers, waving the knife under Benjy Blesker's nose, got him to admit that it was his, admit that he was never without it, admit that he had it in his pocket—maybe even in his hand—the night of the slaying. It was his curtain-closer. Wickers sat down, the prosecution's case stated.

One more day, and it would be finished.

There was a weekend hiatus before the trial resumed. Vernon Wedge spent the time thinking.

It was the old man's fault, he thought bitterly. It was the old man Blesker who was behind all the trouble. His faith in Benjy was the indomitable, obstinate faith of the fanatic. Even if the boy was guilty, concern for his father would prevent him from admitting the truth.

"The funny thing is," he told Olga, his secretary, "if I was on that jury, I wouldn't know how to vote."

Olga clucked.

"You don't look well," she said. "You look anemic. When this is over, you ought to see a doctor."

"A headshrinker, that's what I ought to see."

"I mean a doctor," Olga said firmly.

It was then that the idea was born. Vernon looked at his secretary queerly, and stood up behind the desk.

"You know, it's a thought. Maybe I ought to see one. You remember Doc Hagerty?"

"No."

“Sure you remember! On the Hofstraw case, 1958—”

“But he’s not the kind of doctor I mean. I mean a good all-around G.P.”

“I’m going out,” Vernon said suddenly. “I’ll be at the Dugan Hospital if you need me. But don’t bother me unless it’s urgent.”

He found Hagerty in the basement laboratory of the Dugan Hospital. Olga was right: Hagerty was no chest-thumping, tongue-depressing practitioner; he was more biochemist than physician. But he was what Vernon needed.

Hagerty was a white-haired man with shoulders rounded from years of bending over microscopes, and he smelt vaguely of sulphur.

He turned out to be ignorant of the trial. Vernon summarized the facts briefly, and then talked about blood.

“You mean there were no benzidine tests made?” Hagerty said quickly. “Of the murder weapon?”

“Yes,” Vernon admitted, “and the test proved negative. There weren’t any bloodstains on the knife, you understand, it was clean. The prosecution claims that all traces were wiped or washed off It’s never been much of an issue up till now. But I once heard you talk about a more sensitive test than benzidine—”

“There is,” Hagerty grunted. “Benzidine is the standard blood test in this city, but there’s another one. It’s a lot more delicate, in my opinion, and it’s not always employed. It’s called the reduced phenolphthalein test, and depending on a couple of factors, it might be just what you’re looking for.”

“What factors?”

“The quality of the blade metal, for one thing. And even if the metal is porous enough to retain microscopic particles of blood, it may be impossible to determine whose. If your boy ever cut his finger, or somebody else—”

“What do we have to do?” Vernon said excitedly.

“Get me the knife.”

“That’s impossible. It’s court property at the moment.”

“Then get me half a dozen like it.”

The lawyer spent all of Saturday morning searching for the weapon’s counterpart. His mental picture of it was sharp; he even remembered the letters at the base of the blade: B.L. CO. USA.

He finally found one in a dingy variety store four blocks from the scene of the stabbing. The proprietor had exactly five left in stock; he took them all.

There was a two-hour wait that afternoon before he could see Hagerty again; when the white-haired doctor joined him in the laboratory, he didn't apologize.

"I have the solution all ready," he said crisply. "You sure this is the same make of knife?"

"Positive."

Hagerty sprung the large blade. Then he removed a bottle of whole blood from a cabinet, and dipped it inside. Vernon swallowed in revulsion as Hagerty wiped the blade clean with a soft cloth, and marked the knife with a pencil.

"Any trace?" he said, offering it for examination.

"Clean as a whistle."

Hagerty brought all five blades to a beaker filled with a murky liquid. Vernon helped him open all the knives, and they were ready for the demonstration.

"Mix 'em up good," Hagerty said. "It's like a magic trick; you shuffle 'em up. I'll find the one."

Vernon scrambled the knives. Then, one by one, Hagerty dipped them into the solution.

The third one turned the liquid pink. It was the knife that had been marked.

"It works," Vernon breathed. "It really works."

"The metal is porous. If there were bloodstains on it from years ago, this test would show it up."

"Thank you," Vernon said humbly. "You've saved my life. Doc."

"Your life?" Hagerty said dryly.

When Vernon entered Benjy's cell, the boy was reading a pulp magazine with intense concentration. He seemed detached, disinterested. Vernon understood it; he had seen this before in the condemned.

"Listen to me," he said harshly. "Listen good. I have an idea that might save you, but I have to know the truth."

"I told you everything—"

"There's a test," the lawyer said. "A test that can determine whether or not there was ever blood on that knife of yours."

"So?"

"I propose to make that test in court on Monday. If it's negative, the jury will know you didn't kill Kenny Tarcher."

"I don't understand that kind of stuff—"

"I'm not asking you to understand," Vernon said tautly. "If you stabbed that boy, a solution is going to turn pink and you can kiss your freedom goodbye. What's more, if you ever cut anybody with that knife, even yourself, it'll turn pink. So I want you to tell me now. *Was there ever blood on that knife?*"

"I told you I didn't cut him!"

"You moron!" Vernon shouted. "Do you understand my question? Was there ever blood of any kind on that knife?"

"No! It was brand-new. I never cut anybody with it."

"You're sure? Absolutely sure?"

"I told you, didn't I?"

"This is scientific stuff, boy, don't think you can fool a test tube!"

"I said it's clean!"

Vernon Wedge sighed, and stood up.

"Okay, Benjy. We'll see how clean it is. We'll give it a bath. And God help you if you lied to me."

On Monday, Wickers rose to make his final peroration. He was bland-faced, a picture of confidence. Vernon looked at the vacant faces of the jurors, waiting for their emotional rubdown. But he wasn't going to allow it.

He stood up, and addressed Judge Dwight.

"Your Honor, something occurred over the weekend which I consider of paramount importance to this case. I ask the court's permission to introduce new evidence."

"Objection," Wickers said calmly. "The defense has had sufficient time for the introduction of evidence. I suggest this is a delaying tactic."

Vernon looked defeated, but he was only playing possum. Judge Dwight prompted him.

"What sort of evidence, Mr. Wedge?"

"It's a demonstration. Your Honor," he said weakly. "In my opinion, it will clearly establish my client's guilt or innocence. But if the court rules

—”

“Very well, Mr. Wedge, you may proceed.”

Quickly, Vernon undid the clasps of the black box in front of him. He removed the wide-mouthed beaker, and then the foil lid that covered it. He brought the murky solution to the bench that held the trial exhibits.

“And what is this?” Judge Dwight said.

“This, Your Honor, is a chemical solution specifically formulated for the detection of blood.”

The courtroom buzzed; on the prosecution’s side of the room, there was a hurried consultation.

Vernon faced the jurors.

“Ladies and gentlemen. Exhibit A in this case is the knife which presumably killed Kenneth Tarcher. This is the knife which was in the possession of Benjamin Blesker the night of the slaying. Yet not one shred of testimony has been heard during this trial concerning the vital factor of blood!”

He picked up the knife, and sprung the long, shining blade.

“This knife!” he said, waving it in the air. “Look at it carefully. It has never left the court’s possession since my client’s arrest. Yet this clean, shiny blade can still tell a story of guilt or innocence. For as every biochemist knows, there is an infallible test which can determine whether an object of such porous metal has ever been stained with even one drop of blood!”

He poised the knife over the mouth of the beaker.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I intend to prove once and for all whether I have been defending a boy falsely accused, or a lying murderer. I intend to dip this blade in the solution. If it turns pink—you must punish him for his guilt. If it remains clear—you must do what is just, and set him free.”

Slowly, he brought the knife down.

“Your Honor!”

Wickers was on his feet, and Vernon halted.

“Your Honor, objection! Objection!”

“Yes, Mr. Wickers?”

Wickers’ eyes flashed angrily. “Defense counsel is acting improperly. The police laboratory has already made the standard benzidine test of the

weapon and found no bloodstains on the blade. We admit that the knife has been cleansed—"

"Your Honor," Vernon said loudly, "the sensitivity of this test far exceeds the benzidine—"

"This performance is irrelevant, immaterial, and completely improper!" Wickers whirled to the jury. "At no time during this trial has the prosecution denied the absence of blood on Benjamin Blesker's knife. Any so-called "test" that corroborates this is completely gratuitous, and is intended as pure theatrics to mislead and befuddle the jury! I demand this farcial demonstration be stopped!"

There was a moment's silence. Vernon looked up at the judge hopefully, waiting.

Dwight folded his hands.

"Mr. Wedge, I'm afraid you're not in a position to qualify as an expert in forensic chemistry. And, as Mr. Wickers says, mere corroboration of the police laboratory report is gratuitous evidence that cannot be properly admitted. Therefore, the objection is sustained."

"But Your Honor—"

"Sustained," Judge Dwight said gravely. "You cannot make the test, Mr. Wedge."

His summation was the briefest of his career.

"I believe Benjamin Blesker is innocent," he said wearily. "I believe this because of a test I was not permitted to make. This boy knew that the results of this test might have condemned him, yet he told me to proceed. No guilty man would have allowed it; no innocent man would have had it any other way."

The jury was out less than an hour. When they returned, they declared that Benjamin Blesker was innocent.

Vernon was permitted the use of an adjoining chamber for a meeting with his client. It wasn't a victory celebration. The boy seemed stunned, and the happiness in old man Blesker's face looked more like sorrow. When the lawyer entered the room, he stood up shakily and held out his hand.

"God bless you," he whispered. "Bless you for what you did."

"I didn't come to be congratulated," Vernon said coldly. "I wanted to see you both for another reason."

The bailiff entered, and placed the beaker on the desk. When he left, Vernon took the knife out of his pocket, and put it down beside the beaker. The old man picked it up and looked at the weapon as if he had never seen it before.

"Wickers was right," Vernon said flatly. "What I did out there was theatrics. I didn't want to make the demonstration; I was counting on the prosecution halting it."

"You didn't want to?" Blesker said blankly. "You didn't want to make the test?"

"I could have gotten an expert, a real one, like Doc Hagerty. But I didn't want to take the chance; if this stuff turned red. . ." He looked at the beaker and frowned. "No," he said. "The risk was too great. If Wickers had played along, I would have been forced to do it. But I figured they would object, and the jury would be impressed the right way. They were, thank God."

Blesker let out a long sigh.

"But now there's something we have to do," Vernon said. "Something to satisfy us all."

"What do you mean?"

Vernon looked at the boy. Benjy wouldn't meet his eyes.

"I still don't know the truth," the lawyer said. "I don't know it, and neither do you. Only Benjy here knows it."

"You can't mean that! You said yourself—"

"Never mind what I said out there. There's only one way we can really know, Mr. Blesker."

He held out his hand.

"Give me the knife, Mr. Blesker. We're going to make the test the judge wouldn't allow. For our own sakes."

"But why?" the old man cried. "What difference does it make?"

"*Because I want to know!* Even if you don't, Mr. Blesker, I want to know!"

"Give me the knife," Vernon said.

Blesker picked up the knife. He touched its cool blade thoughtfully.

"Of course," he said.

Then, slowly, he drew the blade deliberately across the back of his hand. The sharp edge bit deep. Blood welled like a crimson river in the cut and stained his hand, his cuff, his sleeve, the surface of the desk. He looked at

the wound sadly, indifferently, and then handed the dripping weapon to the attorney.

"Make your test," he said dreamily. "Make your test now, Mr. Wedge."

And as Vernon stared at him, he removed a crumpled handkerchief from his pocket and wound it around his injured hand. Then he took his son's arm, and they left the room together.

Burglar Proof

Aired: February 27, 1962

Teleplay by Henry Slesar

Directed by John Newland

Starring: Robert Webber and Paul Hartman

There was a noticeable difference in the width of his smile and the length of his stride as Harrison Fell emerged from the elevator into the lobby of Bliss & Bakerfield, Inc., Advertising. The receptionist got a rousing good morning; the mail boy an unaccustomed hello; Hilda, Fell's secretary, got the carnation he wore in his lapel. For a man already ground up and spewed out by the agency's rumor mill, Harrison Fell was acting strangely unconcerned.

"Get me the big chief," he grinned at Hilda. "Tell him to brace himself. Tell him I'm dropping an H-bomb right in his lap. Well, go on, go on. Tell Bliss I want to see him!"

Hilda swallowed, and picked up her phone. She spoke briefly to Bliss's secretary and arranged for the bomb run. When she informed her boss that Bliss was braced and waiting. Fell shot out of his swivel chair as if from an ejection seat.

On the stairway between the two floors, the account executive lost some of his ebullience. He was a large, broadchested man with shoulders by Brooks Brothers, hair by Brylcreem, skin by Man Tan, and soul by Cadillac. Only a month ago, he had been a shining light in the agency's firmament. Then Winford Stark, advertising manager of the Holdwell Safe Corporation, had asked for his removal from the account. Fell had blamed everyone but himself for the failure of the Holdwell advertising; the copywriter was a drunk, the art director a Communist, the TV producer a dope addict. But Bliss, a wise old fox in the advertising forest, calmly put the blame where it belonged.

Fell came into the executive office radiating confidence. It didn't take the chill out of Bliss's expression. The small, dapper man ruffled his mustache like a whiskery terrier, and growled. "Five minutes," he said. "Five minutes is all I can give you, Harrison."

"That's all I need, chief. I've got just the prescription for what ails Holdwell."

“We’ve been all through that, Harrison.”

“Not through this bale of hay, we haven’t. I came up with the needle, and I’m going to stick it right into that bubblehead Stark. It’s the greatest safe advertising idea you ever heard. Just let me get it off the launching pad!”

Bliss sighed. “Must you talk like that, Harrison? Half the time I don’t understand you.”

“You’ll understand this, chief. You know that new safe the Holdwell people are about to put in orbit?”

“The 801?”

“That’s it. Well, maybe they thought our ideas were thin before, but this one is a regular Charles Atlas. This one’s got muscles, chief, wait till you hear it—”

“I’m waiting.”

Fell paused, and with a melodramatic gesture pulled a newspaper clipping from his pocket. He slapped it on Bliss’s desk and stood back with folded arms. Bliss looked down at a two-column photograph of a balding, nondescript man with wide, innocent eyes.

“What’s this?” he said.

“Read it,” Fell said. “It’s my candidate for an 801 testimonial. 801—the first truly burglar-proof safe!”

“Sammy ‘The Touch’ Morrissey,” Bliss read. “You mean you want to put him in a Holdwell ad?”

Fell laughed. “Can you think of a better testimonee? That’s the trouble with the campaign we got now, chief. What the hell good is a testimonial from Satisfied User? This is a man who really knows whether a safe is burglar-proof. The hottest safe-cracker in the business!”

“Are you serious, Harrison?”

“Of course I am! Don’t you get it? We’ll hire Sammy himself to try and crack the 801. In public, with reporters and everything. The works! We’ll get terrific publicity and a great ad campaign!”

“But if he’s still in jail—”

“He was paroled a year ago. He’s been a good boy, crimewise, ever since. Forced retirement, I guess you’d call it. But he’s still got the know-how, chief, and if he can’t bust open the 801, who can?”

Bliss mused over the photograph, fingering his mustache. When he looked up, there was grudging admiration in his eyes.

"Well, it's not really a had idea."

"Tell the truth, chief. It's a blockbuster!"

Bliss reached for the phone.

"Let's not go overboard about it. We'll see what Stark thinks of it."

Fell opened the humidor on Bliss's desk and helped himself to a panatela. The boss didn't stop him.

Fell's suit, narrow-brim hat, carnation and personality were blatantly out of tune with Sammy Morrissey's rooming house. He parked his Jaguar between a meat truck and a vintage Chevy, growled at the mop-haired urchins who eyed its hubcaps and took the worn stairs as nonchalantly as if they had been the steps of the University Club. A landlady with a gin breath greeted him and guided him to the top floor where Sammy Morrissey lived in honest poverty.

Sammy was a disappointment. He was small and scrawny, devoid of menace, cunning and even character. His eyes were fixed rather than shifty. They were round, the color of faded denim. He looked more like an aging scoutmaster than a master criminal. Fell sighed inwardly, and tried to visualize the lighting tricks a photographer might use to make Sammy "The Touch" look more dangerous than he appeared.

"Sit down," Sammy said politely. "I got your letter, Mr. Fell, but I don't quite—"

"There's really nothing complicated about it," Fell said urbanely, taking the chair with the least upholstery. "My client, the Holdwell Corporation, has a new product they believe to be wholly burglar-proof. We merely want your help in proving their claim valid."

"Yeah, I understand that part," Sammy said. "Only that's what I mean, Mr. Fell, you shouldn't be askin' me about safe jobs. I'm out of that line of work altogether."

"Oh, there's nothing illegal about this," Fell smiled. "Police wise, it's absolutely legitimate. You see, we think a man of your great reputation—"

"I'm trying to live that down, Mr. Fell."

Fell frowned. This wasn't going to be simple.

"Sammy—I can call you Sammy, can't I?—Sammy, you know what an advertisement is?"

“Yeah, sure, I see ads all the time.”

“Well, Sammy, that’s all we’re talking about. We want you to appear in our advertising, to give your testimony—”

“Testimony?” Sammy said nervously.

“Not like in court,” Fell explained. “You’ll simply endorse our product, that’s all. You’ll tell people how you tried to crack the 801, but found it absolutely burglar-proof.”

“Gee, Mr. Fell, no safe is really burglar-proof.”

“How’s that?”

“I mean, there ain’t no such thing. Excuse me for saying. But if you got enough time and tools, you can bust any of’em. Anyway, I’m not interested, Mr. Fell, I’m in a different line of work now—”

Fell gritted his teeth.

“Sammy, try to understand. We’re offering you a thousand dollars just to try and crack open this safe, with every trick you know. We’ll give you three hours to do it in, and there’ll be plenty of witnesses. Reporters, cops —”

“Cops?” Sammy blanched.

“Just as witnesses, just to make sure your effort is legitimate. The 801 isn’t a very large safe, about four by four, but it’s got a new time lock mechanism the Holdwell people think is foolproof. In fact, they’re so sure you can’t do it, Sammy, they’ll make it a real challenge. They’ll put an envelope in this safe containing fifty one thousand dollar bills. If you can open the safe in under three hours, the money is yours.”

Sammy’s innocent eyes blinked.

“You kidding, Mr. Fell? Fifty grand?”

“Fifty thousand, Sammy, and it’s all yours if you can do it. It’ll be the biggest haul of your life, and you won’t have any cops on your trail afterwards. Now doesn’t that sound tempting?”

“It sure does,” Sammy said. “It’s just that—”

“I know,” Fell said sourly. “You’re in a different line of work. But is it paying off, Sammy? Paying off like this?”

“No,” Sammy admitted. “Not like this.”

“It’ll be great for you, moneywise. And great for us, saleswise. What do you say?”

Sammy rubbed his balding forehead. Then he nodded.

“Okay, Mr. Fell. I’ll do it.”

“Wonderful! It’s a pleasure to do business with you, Sammy.”

“Likewise,” Sammy said shyly.

The turnout for Harrison Fell’s 801 promotion exceeded his predictions to the client. Reporters from five metropolitan dailies, nine out-of-town newspapers and two major news services showed up at Holdwell’s Long Island City plant for Operation Safecrack. The *New Yorker* sent their man Stanley, four true detective magazines were represented, along with six other magazines serving various interests. The best that Fell could produce in the way of official coverage was the Assistant Commissioner of Police, but he brought along three burly patrolmen as an honor guard. The sight of the blue uniforms caused Sammy “The Touch” Morrissey to gulp nervously and start muttering about backing out. As the nine o’clock deadline approached, the crowd grew greater. Some thirty executives of the Holdwell Corporation, and half that number from envious competitors, entered the empty brick warehouse that had been reserved for the occasion. Bliss, the agency president, was on the scene, and so was Winford Stark, the Holdwell ad manager, beaming and shaking hands and acting as if the entire promotion had been his own idea. Drinks were served in generous supply, and the atmosphere became festive, smoky, noisy and reminiscent of New Year’s Eve. As the jostling crowds pushed, shoved, spilled liquor, told jokes and had a whopping good time, Sammy and the 801 waited quietly for their moment of combat.

Finally, Harrison Fell, self-appointed master of ceremonies, stood on a chair to gain attention.

“Gentlemen! Gentlemen, please! May we have some quiet?”

It took some time, but he got it.

“Gentlemen, I want to thank you all for this splendid showing, and I know you’ll all be glad you came tonight. So without further ado, let me introduce you to the honored guests of the evening. In this corner, gentlemen—” he pointed like a fight announcer, and drew a gratifying chuckle from the crowd, “weighing two thousand, three hundred and seventy pounds, the Holdwell 801, the world’s champion burglar-proof safe. And in this corner, at one hundred and twelve pounds, Sammy ‘The Touch’ Morrissey!”

There was even more applause for little Sammy; even the assistant commissioner joined it.

"As you all know," Fell said, enjoying the spotlight, "safecracking-wise, Sammy Morrissey holds the worlds record in every division. Mostly Safe and Loft." He waited for his laugh. "But the Holdwell Corporation believes that the 801 will defy Sammy's best efforts. And so strong is their faith that they make this incredible challenge." He withdrew a white business envelope from his pocket. "In this envelope are fifty, one thousand dollar bills, gentlemen. Fifty thousand dollars! Mr. Grady, will you please open the door of the safe?"

Grady, a Holdwell guard, did as instructed.

"Mr. Grady, will you please place the envelope inside the 801?"

Grady took the bulky envelope from Fell's hand, and put it in the safe.

"Now, Mr. Grady, will you please lock the door of the safe, and set the time mechanism for nine-o'clock tomorrow morning?"

Grady, with a strong deliberate motion, slammed the laminated steel door shut and twirled the dials.

"All set, sir," he said, and saluted smartly.

"Gentlemen," Harrison Fell told the hushed crowd, "the gauntlet is thrown. The Holdwell Corporation hereby challenges America's Number One Safecracker, the honorable Sammy 'The Touch' Morrissey, Retired, to open the 801 before midnight. And if Mr. Morrissey succeeds, the contents of this safe become his exclusive property. Are you ready, Sammy?"

Sammy's Adam's apple bobbed.

"I'm ready," he whispered.

"Mr. Grady, would you bring forward the tools that Mr. Morrissey requested?"

Grady came forward, wheeling a long metal bench, its surface covered with implements of every description.

"Will Mr. Morrissey examine this equipment and make sure that everything is in order?"

"I already checked it," Sammy said.

"Is everything there? Bits, drills, levers, chisels, hose, acetylene gas containers, torches, explosives?"

"It's all here, Mr. Fell."

“Then, gentlemen, we begin. Those of you who tire of watching Mr. Morrissey’s efforts will be welcome in the Holdwell executive dining room in the main building. Refreshments will be served. Go to it, Sammy—and may the best man win!”

He got off the chair to tumultuous applause. Sammy waited until the crowd was silent once more, and then he approached the safe warily.

A strange, almost eerie hush fell over the room as Sammy circled the 801. He moved noiselessly on his sneakered feet, like a cat appraising an oddly indifferent mouse. There was something defiant about the look of the steel gray box as it squatted on its four elephant-thick legs; a hulking, belligerent, challenging aspect. Sammy moved slowly, not even touching it, his small, scoutmaster’s face wizened in concentration.

Then he put one finger on the metal surface, and scratched lightly. In the back of the room a reporter giggled.

Sammy wasn’t bothered by the sound. He no longer seemed to be aware of his audience. He scratched, smoothed, petted, and fondled the safe. He touched its complex dials lovingly. He bent down and examined the door, its invisible hinges, its bolts, its array of tiny numbers. There were floodlamps on all four sides of him; he moved one of them just a trifle to eliminate a shadow. Then he studied the door of the safe again, motionless, squatting like a contemplative Buddha.

The witnesses stirred restlessly, wanting action.

Deliberately, Sammy went to the tool table and selected an electric drill and a sectional jimmy.

As he plugged the drill into the wall socket, the assistant commissioner of police snickered and whispered to one of the patrolmen. It didn’t faze the safecracker. He placed the drill bit on the upper left hand corner of the safe door and pulled the trigger. The noise of the bit grinding against the metal jarred everyone in the room. Then the bit snapped, and Sammy looked down at the implement sadly. There was a laugh or two.

Sammy’s next choice from the table was a simple one: a metal center punch, and a sledgehammer. He took them both to the 801, made a close examination of the flat dials and then shrugged his narrow shoulders. Whatever he had in mind wasn’t going to work; with professional goodnaturedness, he replaced the tools.

Nearby, Harrison Fell prodded Winford Stark with his elbow. A month ago. Stark would have reddened at the intimacy; now he grinned back and looked pleased. From the crowd, a news cameraman caught a picture of Sammy in action.

At this point, it wasn't much of a picture. Sammy was studying the 801 with a beleaguered expression. It was obvious that he was up against something new and puzzling. He put his hands on the side of the safe and heaved; it resisted his puny muscles. With a look almost of pleading, he caught Fell's eye. Then he whispered his request, and Fell obliged. He motioned to the three patrolmen, who came forward and assisted Sammy "The Touch" in laying the 801 on its side. The spectacle of the law's minions cooperating with a safecracker released some of the tension. A chuckle rippled through the room.

Then Sammy went on his knees and began a scrutiny of the safe bottom; Fell knew it wasn't going to help. There were some safes with soft underbellies, but the 801 wasn't one of them. Sammy put a new carbon bit in his electric drill and set to work. The bit snapped, and he looked at the broken end forlornly. With a weary gesture, he motioned to the cops to set the 801 upright.

At nine forty-five, the safe was unscathed, and Sammy was reaching for the acetylene torch. For half an hour, the hot white flame licked at the 801's laminated steel door.

By the time Sammy gave up, there was a discoloration the size of a dinner plate, but the safe was as solid as ever.

Sammy's shirt was soaked through, and his eyes were paler and more pathetic than before.

"He can't do it," Winford Stark whispered to Fell. "He'll never crack that baby!"

Harrison Fell smiled confidently, but watched tensely as Sammy reached for the vial of nitroglycerin. The real test of the 801 was yet to come, and it meant clearing the room all the way back to the doors. Holdwell's laboratory experts hadn't been able to blow the safe open with nitro, not with the small amount necessary to blast only the safe and not the building. But the moment was still a trying one.

"Everybody back," Fell cried authoritatively. "Everyone to the exit, please!"

There were no keyholes or other apertures in the 801 for Sammy to place the explosive, but he solved the problem by taping the vial near the hinge. Then he selected a hammer from the workbench, stepped back ten paces and hurled it at the vial. It was a good toss; Sammy dropped to the floor and covered his head. The explosion rattled the panes in every window of the building, but when the smoke cleared, the 801 was almost insolent in its solid impenetrability.

Sammy was really in trouble now. It was almost eleven o'clock, and he seemed to be getting nowhere. Almost two-thirds of the crowd wandered off to enjoy the hospitality of the Holdwell Corporation's executive dining room. By eleven-thirty, with Sammy squatting on his haunches and picking uselessly at the locks with a steel pin, there were only half a dozen witnesses.

Sammy began using a stethoscope, listening for the sound of falling tumblers. But Jimmy Valentine was a myth, and so was Sammy's famous "touch." Sammy had chopped, burned, punched, and ripped safes apart; he had never coaxed one open with sensitive fingertips. And neither, as far as he knew, had anybody else. But Sammy was trying now, the sweat rippling down his forehead and behind his protruding ears, his eyes staring and glassy, his lips dry, his breath short, his hands unsteady. It was desperation, a last hope.

At fifteen minutes to twelve, the crowd returned again to watch the last round of the struggle.

Five minutes later, with all breaths bated and not even a cough in the crowd, Sammy was still fiddling with the time mechanism.

Then there were only minutes left.

Sammy stood up. He swayed on his feet like a drunk. With an animal sound in his throat, he staggered to the bench and began looking for an implement that existed only in his imagination. He scattered tools left and right, picked one up and threw it away, grabbed another, glared at it and hurled it from him. Then he lifted the sledge hammer and brought it to the safe. With all the strength remaining in his thin arms, he swung the hammer against the door with a resounding *blunk!* The vibrations shot through the handle and into his body, loosening his grip. The sledge hammer dropped to the floor, and Sammy, breathing like a winded horse, stood before the 801 with bowed head, slumped shoulders and surrender in his eyes.

It was midnight, and the 801 was victorious.

The cheer that went up wasn't for the insensate metal box; it was for Sammy. Even the cops cheered, in that special applause reserved for the gallant loser. Fell rushed over and shook his hand, hugged the little safecracker with his beefy arms. Flashbulbs popped. Some of the reporters, caught in the moment's excitement, rushed for the phones as if they had been covering a space launching. Winford Stark, grinning in triumph, was busily trying to hand out literature to the magazine reporters. From the back of the room, a bottle made its way to the safecracker, and Sammy took a long, grateful swallow of good whiskey.

Then Fell stood on his chair and made the curtain speech. He thanked them for their attendance, thanked Sammy for his noble effort, cited American ingenuity and stick-to-it-iveness, and then presented Sammy "The Touch" Morrissey with the loser's share—$1,000 in cash.

"Thanks," Sammy said, accepting the money. "I guess you really got yourselves a safe there."

The crowd went wild.

The party was still going on when Sammy, humbled and anonymous, slipped out the door.

Fell's secretary didn't echo his cheery greeting the next morning. "Message for you," she said crisply. "Winford Stark wants you to call him immediately."

Fell grinned and dusted his lapel. "More kudos," he sighed. "Get him for me, will you, sweetie?"

Hilda did. When Stark bellowed like a wounded bull at the other end of the receiver. Fell looked at the instrument in surprise. "Why, what's wrong, Winford?" he said.

"Wrong? I'll tell you what's wrong!" Stark shouted. "When the time lock opened the 801 this morning, we took a look inside. And you know what we found? An envelope containing fifty nice slips of green paper. *Paper,* Fell, you hear me?"

"Paper?" Fell gulped. "Not money?"

"Not money!" Stark screamed. "Just paper! That's fifty thousand buck's Fell, and it's coming right out of your hide!"

"But it's not possible! I put the money in myself! Somebody—" He sat down quickly. "Somebody must have switched the envelopes—"

Stark's voice was cracking on in a steady stream of abuse, invective and threats, but Harrison Fell wasn't hearing a word.

"Sammy," he said weakly.

"What's that?"

"Sammy!" Fell groaned. "He told me he was in a different line of work. I should have listened to him! Why didn't I listen to him? He's no safecracker any more—he's a pickpocket!"

Most Likely to Succeed

(published title: “Beggars Can Be Chosen”)

Aired: May 8, 1962

Teleplay by Henry Slesar

Directed by Richard Whorf

Starring: Jack Carter and Howard Morris

Stanley Towers put a six-inch gash in the felt of his new billiard table two days after its arrival; he wasn’t fit to live with until the rent was repaired. The billiard room, his latest addition to his multi-level house, was his pride and joy. He had been something of an expert in college; but time, lack of practice, and an obtrusive paunch had ruined his game.

He was hard at it on Saturday afternoon when Selena entered timidly and murmured something about the kitchen. He growled at the maid, instructing her to take up the problem with his wife. But Mrs. Towers, it seemed, was on still another shopping expedition in the city, and all domestic problems were his to settle.

“Well, what is it?” Stanley said.

“It’s a man, sir, at the back door. He wants odd jobs or something.”

“Tell him to go away. You let one tramp in, they put the mark on you for all the other bums.”

“He looks decent enough, Mr. Towers. And I was thinking about that wood you wanted cut—”

Stanley missed a simple cushion shot, and cursed. “All right,” he grumbled. “Take him to the shed and show him what has to be done. Tell him he can have a meal and three dollars.”

“Yes, sir.”

The interruption decided him. Stanley replaced the cue stick, and turned off the overhanging light. Then he walked into the living room, picked up a copy of a business weekly, and began searching for items concerning his own field. There were none that interested him. He looked at his watch, and saw that he had half an hour to go for his next cigar allotment. He pushed the remote control switch of his television set and watched twenty minutes of old movies and cold remedy commercials. Then he decided he was hungry, and went to the kitchen.

The tramp was at the kitchen table, matted head low over a plate of stew. Stanley had forgotten about him in the interval, and he stood in the kitchen doorway and looked him over with mild curiosity. He wore a grease-spotted Army field jacket, speckled with scraps of wood from his chore. He wasn't aware of Stanley's presence for a moment, but then he glanced up and met his eyes.

"S'all right," Stanley said. "Don't mind me."

The tramp stared at him blankly, dabbed a paper napkin on his unshaven cheeks, and continued to eat a little less wolfishly than before. He was about Stanley's age, but thin, rangy, a pack rat.

Stanley walked into the room and looked at his watch. Cigar time. He plucked one from the pocket of his dressing gown, crackled off the wrapper, and lit up.

"Say, didn't I see you around town?" he said.

"No," the tramp muttered. "Just passing through."

"Funny. I could have sworn—"

The head came up from the stew; the tramp's eyes met his again. Recognition came to Stanley in a shock wave.

"Dave Sumner!" he cried. "For the love of Mike! Dave!"

The spoon froze in mid-air. The tramp's face went baffled, surprised, injured as if slapped by the shouting words.

"How'd you know?" he rasped. "How'd you know my name?"

"For Pete's sake, don't you know me? Don't you recognize me? I'm Stan Towers." There was no understanding in the thin face. "Towers" Stanley said exasperatedly. "Washington and Lee. Class of'59. Don't you remember?"

"Towers," the tramp said softly. "Yeah, sure. I remember you."

Stanley laughed. He turned away, rubbing his pudgy chin until he had control of his facial muscles.

"Well, I'll be damned," he said. "Sure is funny meeting you again, Dave, like this, I mean. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but—"

"You don't have to worry about that," the tramp said slowly. "Nothing hurts my feelings. I'll be getting along now, wood's all cut, thanks for the food—"

"Now wait a minute! We haven't even—I mean, don't you want to talk a while?"

“Nothing to talk about.”

“Listen, I know it’s a long time.” Stanley went to the table and sat down. “What the hell happened to you, Dave? Of all people. I mean—you were tops. You were the one they picked Most Likely to Succeed—”

“You don’t have to remind me.”

“Don’t get sore. You can’t blame me for being curious—”

“I don’t blame you,” the tramp said. “You like hard luck stories? I could give you an earful. But you got better things to do.”

“No, I want to hear it, honest. Here,” Stanley said, eagerly. “Have a cigar? How about some coffee?”

“Sure,” Dave Sumner said.

He drank the coffee down first, greedily. Then he lit the cigar, exhaled luxuriously, and said:

“I don’t know what happened myself, that’s the God’s honest truth. I did okay when I graduated—you remember, I was heading for that diplomatic post, high-level stuff, big shots pulling for me in Washington.” He sneered. “Only then I found out what the job paid, and I lost interest. Took a place with a brokerage house, friend of my old man’s. Ended up marrying his daughter. We didn’t get along, and I dumped her. Or maybe it was the other way around, I don’t even remember. I was paying alimony for six years, blood money, right out of my veins, until she hooked some other sucker. Then I started drinking. After that, it was one big sliding pond.”

Sumner bit hard on the cigar, and the ash dropped to the kitchen floor. He looked apologetic, but Stanley didn’t notice. Stanley’s chest was heaving.

“I just can’t believe it,” he said. “You of all people. And me—” He chuckled. “You remember me, Dave, how I was in school? I never could get that book stuff through my skull, not like you could.” He crossed his leg, hugging the soft leather slipper on his foot. “All I could ever do was shoot billiards, remember? Now I got my own billiard room. That’s something, huh?”

“You did all right,” Sumner said, looking at the ash soiling the clean tiles.

“Yeah, I did all right,” Stanley said expansively. “You remember that little machine shop my old man had? It was a joke on wheels, remember? Well, I took that little place—” he shifted the cigar around in his mouth—”I

took that little nothing and made it big. Package machinery, that's my line. You make it, we wrap it. Great business, Dave, big overhead, but great business."

"Congratulations," Sumner said ironically.

"I did fine," Stanley said. "I made a bundle, Dave, I don't mind telling you. It wasn't easy, but I did it."

"I wish I knew the secret," Sumner said. "I never learned that trick. I never could put two bucks close enough to get 'em warm. I tried to save, put together a stake, but something always happened. And then the taxes—"

"That's where I shine, buddy," Stanley said happily. "That's the real lesson to learn, if you're in business. You got to know the angles. You got to learn how to keep what you make. I figured out more sweet dodges than you can shake a stick at. I make half my deals in cash and it never gets on the books. My customers get a 10 percent discount, and I get the tax benefits. You don't learn those things in school, Dave. Maybe that's the difference between you and me. Hey!" Stanley said, clapping his hands. "I wish you could meet my wife, Dave. You ever got to the—no, I guess you don't see many shows." He rubbed his paunch affectionately. "My wife is a Broadway Actress," he said.

Sumner stood up. "I better get going."

"Wait a minute, Dave, I can't have you going off this way."

Stanley reached into his hip pocket for his wallet. He unfolded the smooth pigskin and dipped in for a bill; on second thought, he made it two. They were both twenties.

"Take this," he said. "It's not a loan, it's a present."

"The maid said three bucks—"

"Never mind what the maid said, Dave. I want you to have it. Just for old time's sake. Dave, please, huh?"

Sumner hesitated, then took the bills and stuffed them hurriedly into his pocket. He seemed incapable of saying anything else. He turned and went to the screen door of the kitchen. Stanley looked after him, the cigar bobbing in his mouth.

When Deirdre returned from her shopping trip, smelling of martinis, she found her husband in the living room, pawing over the tattered remnants of his college yearbook.

"What's all this?" she said. "Getting nostalgic?"

Stanley laughed. “Here he is,” he chortled. “Look at him, look. Dave Sumner, voted Most Likely to Succeed.”

“Nice looking,” Deirdre said. “Where are you? Never mind,” she frowned, spotting the moon-face. “I’d know that kisser anywhere. What’d they say about you?”

Stanley gritted his teeth. “Pool Shark,” he said. Then he grinned, and pulled her towards him. “Wait’ll I tell you what happened,” he said.

It was six months before Stanley saw Dave Sumner again. On November 6, he received a summons to appear at the offices of the Treasury Department to answer questions about an alleged income tax fraud. He was worried, but prepared. Then he discovered that the government’s preparations were even better than his. There was a record of testimony from his company’s customers that couldn’t be explained away. A week later, the federal grand jury arraigned him for trial.

It was at the trial that he saw Dave walk into the courtroom and take his place at the prosecutor’s table. Dave was still tall, lanky, and self-possessed. But he looked different with his hair combed and his face shaved. He wore a handsomely tailored suit. The same Dave, but different.

Stanley turned to his lawyer.

He said, “Who is he?”

“It’s too bad you didn’t know,” the lawyer said sourly. “He’s the most successful Treasury agent in the department.”

Final Vow

(published title: “Hiding Out”)

Aired: October 25, 1962

Teleplay by Henry Slesar

Directed by Norman Lloyd

Starring: Carol Lynley and Clu Gulager

The arrival of the letter was a challenge to the silence and decorum of the Holy Name Convent. In the cloister, the nuns bent their heads low and murmured about it. In the refectory, the lay sisters whispered the news as they prepared for the midday meal. Even the students in the classrooms seemed to know that the postman’s visit had somehow altered the serene pace and heartbeat of the convent.

Yet only three people knew what the letter contained, and what William Michael Downey had to say to old Sister Lydia after forty years. The Reverend Mother Margaret knew, and the Subprioress, Sister Therese, and, of course. Sister Lydia herself. Mother Margaret visited the old woman in the infirmary and read the letter into the ailing nun’s ear. Sister Lydia was eighty-one, partially paralyzed by a stroke, and William Downey had been her student at a time so distant it might have defied memory; but Sister Lydia remembered, and brought tears, mysteriously, from the dry well of her eyes.

When Mother Margaret returned to her office, her gentleness of manner evaporated. She slapped the letter to the surface of her desk with a sound that made Sister Therese start.

“You’re angry,” the Subprioress said. “That awful man.”

“I’m not judging Mr. Downey,” the Reverend Mother said, “but his request annoys me. If he has such an important matter to discuss, he might do us the courtesy of discussing it here.” She sat down heavily in her chair. “Did you say that Sister Pamela wanted to see me?”

“Yes, she’s terribly anxious. I’m sure you know what she wants. Her time is close, not more than two weeks.” Sister Therese caught her lower lip in a timid bite. “I don’t think she’s going to stay. Mother Margaret. I’m sure that’s what she wants to tell you.”

The Superior hardly seemed to be listening, her mind busy with a sudden concentration of problems.

"We'll have to do what Mr. Downey says, of course, if only for Sister Lydia's sake. Her affection for that man is the wonder of my life." She looked sharply at her officer. "What would you think of sending Sister Pamela and Sister Jem on this errand?"

"Sister Pamela? But I just told you—"

"Yes, I heard you. But with half the convent down with flu, and Easter so close. . .Besides, it might be just what Sister Pamela needs, a day or two away from things. A chance to meet with the world."

"But that's exactly her trouble. Mother Margaret, you know that. She's become so. . .introverted."

The Superior frowned. "You read too much psychology. Sister. You're altogether too modern for me. In my day. Sister Pamela's shyness would have been diagnosed differently. She needs firmness, not Freud."

"But an errand like this? To visit a *criminal?*"

The Reverend Mother paused to consider the objection. Then she smiled and said, "Ask Sister Pamela to see me."

She was young. The eyes below the short black veil had looked out at the world for little more than twenty-two years. She had been raised as an orphan at Holy Name, and made the transition from student to postulant at seventeen. For the last three years she had been Temporarily Professed, and the time for her final vows had come. But even without open declaration of her intent, the convent sisters knew what Sister Pamela was going to do. They read the signs in the sudden outbursts of tears that marked her first years under the veil. They saw it in the awkwardness with which she fulfilled her duties. And in the last few months, they had seen it in a brooding silence that was more than religious withdrawal.

But Mother Margaret was in no mood to face solemn decisions. Instead of giving the young nun permission to speak her mind, she picked up the letter and launched into a brisk explanation of the mission.

"Did you ever hear of a man named William Downey? He was a student at the convent long before you were born."

"No, Reverend Mother," Sister Pamela whispered.

"Consider yourself fortunate." She tapped the edge of the letter on her knuckles. "He's not someone we're proud of. He and Sister Lydia were once quite close, and he's just written her this letter. It asks for some

representative of the Holy Name to pay him a visit. Not on a spiritual errand."

Sister Pamela looked baffled.

"The man is a known criminal," Mother Margaret said flatly. "He's spent many years in prison, and far too many, I gather, out of it. His crimes have earned him a certain amount of material success, and even a degree of false respectability. Do you know what I'm talking about?"

"I think so. Reverend Mother."

The Superior paused. "I'm sending you and Sister Jem to see him. It's only a day's journey; you'll have to take the train into New York and then board another for Connecticut where he makes his home. If you leave tomorrow morning, you could return by Saturday at the latest."

Sister Pamela raised a hand to her white lips. "But Reverend Mother —?"

"I'm sure the trip will do you good. Sister. I know how peaked you've been lately."

"May I speak, Mother Margaret?"

The Superior frowned, and nodded.

"I asked to see you about something else. In two weeks, my temporary vows are over, and—"

"Please, Sister!" The Reverend Mother stood up. "This matter is too important to discuss now. You know the difficulties we've had with illness; our students are suffering and our chores are neglected. When you and Sister Jem return—"

The pale eyes were lowered. "Yes, Reverend Mother."

Mother Margaret smiled softly, and put her arms around the robed shoulders of the young nun, walking her to the door. "Sister Therese will speak to you about the journey. Don't be afraid of this man Downey, your strength is greater than his. And take good care of Sister Jem," she added with a twinkle. "She may not have your courage."

Sister Pamela bowed, and left the office.

Courage, she said in bitterness to her reflection in the train window. Was there gentle irony in Mother Margaret's use of the word? Courage was the least of her qualities; sometimes she thought the habit she wore was only a disguise, a concealment from a world too difficult to understand.

On the seat beside her. Sister Jem's straw hamper swayed and toppled against her. When Sister Jem came down the aisle, teetering with arms outstretched, her round puckered face was almost comical in its anxiety. She dropped into the seat with a relieved sigh.

"A hundred miles an hour!" she gasped.

"No." Sister Pamela smiled. "Fifty or sixty perhaps. We're due to arrive in West Rock at one o'clock, and it's only forty miles from the terminal."

"Arithmetic!" Sister Jem said scornfully. Then she studied the landscape and became more cheerful. "It's such a lovely day! Spring is such a nice season, isn't it?"

"Yes," Sister Pamela agreed.

"It's the time of birth, isn't it? The trees, the flowers; even our Lord was reborn in the spring, wasn't He? I'm glad Mr. Downey wrote Sister Lydia, aren't you?"

"I don't know. I've yet to hear anything good about Mr. Downey."

" Why, there's good in everyone," Sister Jem said comfortably. She turned to look at her companion's face, searching for an answer to her unhappy mood.

She still hadn't solved the riddle by the time the train steamed to a halt at the small suburban station called West Rock. The depot taxi driver gawked curiously at the two black-robed sisters and looked even more astonished when he learned their destination.

The drive to William Downey's estate was a short one. The house was a twin-gabled rambling structure built on a green knoll, with a manicured lawn rolling hundreds of feet to a wooded valley. There was a gatehouse, a barn with empty box stalls and half a dozen outbuildings. Mother Margaret hadn't exaggerated the material success of Mr. Downey; he was plainly a rich man.

The servant who answered the door had a flattened nose and thick speech; later Sister Jem said that he was probably more bodyguard than butler, and she may have been correct.

"Come in. Sisters," he said respectfully. "Mr. Downey's takin' a nap. He said I was to show you in and make yourselves at home."

"Thank you," Sister Pamela said coolly.

Their greatest surprise was waiting inside. The house was richly decorated, the carpets sinfully luxurious and the furnishings chosen more

for effect than comfort. It was more than a house; it was a museum. Every wall panel boasted a painting, the majority religious in both subject and feeling, and where there were no paintings there was statuary, sculptured Madonnas, icons blurred with age and golden with beauty, a triptych depicting the Ascension, an enormous bas-relief that might have come straight from the walls of the Vatican.

Sister Jem gaped openly at her surroundings. Sister Pamela hid her surprise in a smile.

"I see what Mr. Downey meant," she said. "It's not hard to feel at home here."

"I'll show you to your rooms," the butler said. "Maybe you'd like to take a little nap yourselves. Mr. Downey usually comes downstairs for tea at four o'clock."

"That will be fine," Sister Jem said brightly.

They were guided to adjoining guest rooms on the second floor.

Sister Jem took the servant at his word and settled happily into the thick comfort of the bed, but Sister Pamela couldn't sleep. She wandered around the small sunny room, wishing she hadn't finished her book on the train. At length she decided there would be no harm in visiting the bookshelves she had seen in Mr. Downey's living room. She left her room quietly and returned downstairs.

She was scanning the crammed shelves beside the fireplace when she heard the soft thud of the rubber-tipped cane in the doorway.

"Good afternoon. Sister," William Downey said.

She turned, flushing guiltily.

Downey's appearance didn't ease her embarrassment. He was a man in his late sixties, but he had lost nothing in stature or dignity—nor did his white hair soften the hardness of his eyes. He held his head so erectly that he looked downward past his aquiline nose with an expression that was hawklike and even cruel.

"You must be Sister Pamela," he said, walking into the room. He didn't limp; the cane must have been an affectation.

"Yes," she said. "Sister Jem is resting upstairs." She smiled weakly. "How did you know which sister I am?"

"I have sources." He laughed and lowered himself into a chair. "I'd feel a lot better if you'd sit too."

“Of course.” She took the opposite wing chair and folded her hands in her lap.

“Mother Lydia has been writing me for years,” the man said. “Don’t ask me why, I never reply to her letters—but she sends me bulletins on the old place on the average of three or four a year.”

“It probably hasn’t changed much since you were there. It rarely changes.”

“No,” Downey said. “But people do, don’t they?” His grin insinuated something Sister Pamela couldn’t understand. “Take yourself, for instance. Wouldn’t you say you’ve changed?”

“I’m afraid I don’t know what you mean.”

“Mother Lydia talked about you in her letters. About your shyness, about a lot of things.”

The nun flushed again, feeling exposed and vulnerable.

“She’s always worried about you. Mother Lydia has. She’s a smart old woman; she knows what people are really like.” He continued to grin at her, knowledgeably, and she tried a change of subject.

“Your home is lovely. You must be a great admirer of religious art.”

“Yes. Funny, isn’t it? An old heathen like me?”

“I can’t believe that—”

“No?” He rubbed the cane handle against his chin. “You just ask Mother Lydia. You see, I feel the same way about the convent as you do. Sister. For some people, it’s a great hideout.”

She stood up, swallowing hard. “I’m sorry. I’d rather not hear any more about the convent, Mr. Downey. I hardly think you’re an authority.”

“You mean it isn’t true?” He laughed. “I can tell just by looking at you. Sister. You’ve been hiding out in that place since you were a child. You never had a ‘calling’—you just wanted to stay out of this noisy, messy world of ours.”

“Please, Mr. Downey!”

“All right, all right.” He pushed himself up on the cane. “I won’t give you a hard time. Sister, that’s not what I got you here for.”

“Then what did you want?”

He chuckled and walked to the bellpull. When the flat-nosed servant appeared in the doorway, Downey said, “Bring it in, Ralph.” Downey

looked at the nun. “Our business won’t take very long. Sister. But I hope you and your friend will stay for dinner.”

“If it won’t be long. I’d rather take the evening train.”

“Whatever you say.”

Ralph reappeared. He was holding something wrapped in heavy linen. He brought it to Downey, who rested his cane against the fireplace.

“This is what I wanted,” Downey said. “I wanted to give Mother Lydia this.”

He removed the cloth and exposed a statuette little more than a foot high. It was bronze, and age had taken its sheen and color but not its beauty. It was an image of St. Francis of Assisi.

Sister Pamela touched the smooth surface.

“It’s beautiful! You wanted to give Sister Lydia this?”

“Yes,” Downey said. “When I heard the old woman was ill, I thought I’d like to send her something. It should look nice in the chapel, don’t you think?”

“It is very kind of you, Mr. Downey—”

“I would have preferred giving it to Mother Lydia personally, but I’ll be damned if I’ll set foot in that place again.”

“You won’t be damned,” Sister Pamela smiled. She took the statuette in her hands and examined it more closely. Then, with a sudden inkling of its worth, she said, “It must be very old!”

“About five centuries. It comes from the Medici Palace, and it was sculpted by a rather famous man called Donatello. Do you know him. Sister?”

“Donatello? Then it’s terribly valuable!”

“Value isn’t a word we use. Sister,” he said ironically. “We like the word ‘priceless.’ You could probably build half a dozen convents with that little piece of bronze.”

“I don’t know what to say. It’s such a magnificent gift—”

“Be sure to give it to Mother Lydia immediately on your return. Tell her that little Willie is sorry he never replied to her letters, and that he hopes this will make it up to her. But don’t pour it on too thick. Sister.”

The nun stood up. “I must show this to Sister Jem.” She turned from the doorway, her eyes shining. “She was right about you, you know. Sister Jem —”

“Oh? And what did Sister Jem say?”

“That there’s good in everyone.”

Downey laughed heartily, in pure enjoyment.

Sister Jem didn’t stop talking throughout the journey from West Rock to Grand Central Station. She talked about Downey, the magnificence of his house and the grandeur of his collection, and expounded on his character without having said more than “goodbye” to him.

“You see?” she said delightedly. “You see what I told you about people? He’d have to be a good man to do something like this.” Then she had a momentarily dark thought. “I just hope he came by it honestly,” she said.

When they left the train at the terminal, the main floor of the station was crowded with Friday night travelers heading for weekend trains. Her suitcase, with its bronze weight, was a strain on Sister Pamela’s arm. She shifted it from one hand to the other without gaining any relief. Then Sister Jem discovered that she had misplaced the train schedule Sister Theresa had given them, and they went in search of the information booth.

They learned the time and track number at last, and headed for the gate with only minutes to spare. Sister Pamela was panting with exertion, and when the young man in the checkered coat came to her side and lifted his hat she looked at him with startled eyes.

“Can I help you. Sister? That suitcase looks heavy.”

“It’s all right, thank you, I can manage.”

“Please, Sister, I’d like to help.” He took the suitcase from her hand, giving her an amiable, lopsided smile. “Where are you headed?”

“Track 24.”

She looked back at Sister Jem, who was struggling through the crowd with her hamper. Sister Jem waved and caught up, and they both followed the young man, walking a little too rapidly for them through the crowds. Sister Pamela gathered her skirts and hurried to keep him in sight. Sister Jem called for her to wait.

“Hurry, Sister,” the young nun said. “We only have a few minutes. Thank heavens for that man—”

He was well in front of them now, not looking back to see if they were behind him. Then, with bewildering suddenness, they lost sight of him in the crowd, and Sister Pamela had her first pang of fear.

“I don’t see him!” Sister Jem gasped. “Where did he go. Sister?”

“It’s all right. I’m sure it’s all right. He knows the track number, he’ll be there—”

The crowd seemed to be flowing in the opposite direction—a human current that had to be fought. They pushed their way through until they saw their platform number. A conductor was at the gate, preparing to close it.

“He’s not here!” Sister Jem said. “Sister Pamela? Do you see him anywhere?”

“No! But he must be here! Perhaps he’s gone onto the train.” She went up to the conductor and asked if he had seen the young man in the checkered coat. He seemed unable to hear her in the din; she spoke louder.

“Sorry, Sister, an awful lot of people came through the gate.”

Sister Jem was walking in a circle, scanning every face, searching every hand.

“He’s not here! He’s not here!” she moaned. “Oh, how could you have done that. Sister? How could you have trusted that man?”

“He has to be here!”

But he wasn’t; and while the train pulled away from the station, the two nuns of the Holy Name searched the swift-moving blur of hands and faces inside the train and out, hoping and praying that the man in the checkered coat would appear, not wanting to believe that this small act of courtesy was an act of terrible villainy.

Sister Pamela had never associated gentleness with the police, but the solemn-faced men who talked with her and Sister Jem were quiet spoken and kindly. Lieutenant Jacoby was the most understanding; he seemed to recognize the personal agony of Sister Pamela’s loss.

“You don’t have to blame yourself. Sister,” he told her. “It’s the sort of thing that happens all the time; a lot of people come to the big city and think they can trust everybody.”

She had lost the power to weep. There had been too long a flow of tears in the hours following the crime. She stared straight ahead at the dull-green walls of the station house.

“We’re dealing with a particularly low-type of thief, the kind that picks on kids and old ladies—and anyone they figure to be a trusting, easy mark.” Jacoby didn’t look so gentle now. “It’s doubtful that he knows what he has, of course. His ignorance is in our favor. We’re keeping the fact quiet, for whatever it’s worth.”

“The thing he took is priceless,” Sister Pamela whispered. “Don’t you understand? It’s an art treasure; it wouldn’t do him any good.”

“Well, we can’t count on that. There are crooks and crooks these days. Sister, some of them dealing in Picassos. There are collectors who don’t mind stolen merchandise, even if they can’t display it openly. But we’re assuming that the chief won’t know it’s anything more than a nicely shaped hunk of old bronze.”

Jacoby rubbed his bald spot and sighed. Then he came around the front of his desk to face the young nun.

“The trick is to find him. I won’t fool you; it won’t be easy. We’re rounding up every shady character we can think of, men who’ve worked this kind of dodge in the past—”

“I’m sorry about the photographs. All those faces—they didn’t mean anything to me.”

“We’re not surprised at that. But sometimes, a demeanor, a voice, a way of standing is better identification than a face. That’s why we’ve asked you and Sister Jem to come to this lineup.”

“Will we—I mean, can these men see us in the audience?”

“No, Sister. But if you spot anyone who looks like our friend, be sure and tell us immediately. Are you ready?”

“Yes,” Sister Pamela said.

Sister Jem was waiting in the anteroom. She went quickly to her companion’s side and they followed Lieutenant Jacoby to the darkened room where the parade of suspects would march across the ruled backdrop.

For almost an hour they watched the sullen faces, the shuffling walks, the arrogant grins of a hundred strangers. The brilliant lights became painful to the young nun’s eyes; the droning voice of the uniformed inquisitor became a senseless monotone, the muttered replies of the suspects less and less distinguishable.

When the young man with the twisted grin stepped out of the line at the officer’s command, his first reply made Sister Pamela stiffen to attention.

“James K. Bresson. What can I do for you, Sarge?”

“I’ll ask the questions. Take off your hat.”

Bresson took it off. His lank, dark hair fell across his forehead. He would have been good-looking except for a bristly jaw and imperfect teeth.

Jacoby saw Sister Pamela’s motion.

"Recognize him. Sister?"

"I'm—not sure. There was something about the voice."

"What are you doing these days, Bresson?" The sergeant asked. "Still working the terminals?"

"You got me all wrong, Sarge. I'm duly employed."

"And who'd duly employ you, Bresson?"

"I'm working for the Gramercy Printing Company over on Twenty-ninth Street. I'm in the shipping department."

"Not snatching any more suitcases?"

"I never snatched a suitcase. That last time was a bum rap."

She squinted at the man's face, her heart pounding. She tried to recreate the elusive moment in the station, the split-second of confusion in which the thing happened. Jacoby was leaning toward her, waiting.

"Yes," Sister Pamela whispered. "Yes, he could be the one. Lieutenant."

Jacoby whirled to Sister Jem. The older nun was shaking her head.

"No," she said. "No, he couldn't be. Why, he was a much taller man. Sister, you remember. And much younger! He wasn't like this one at all."

Jacoby stood up and went to the sergeant at the podium. He spoke briefly in his ear, and the sergeant nodded. Then he said:

"Step in a little closer, Bresson, we want a real good look at you."

The young man stepped forward, still smiling.

"You ever go to church, Bresson?"

Not a flicker. "Who, me, Sarge? What are you trying to do, convert me?"

"You were hanging around Grand Central on Friday night, weren't you? Around seven-thirty?"

"Friday night?"

"Answer the question!"

"No," Bresson said. "Friday night I was with my girl. You don't believe me, ask her. I was at my girl's apartment, six o'clock to midnight."

"What's the name of your girl?"

"Her name's Bess Macken. She lives at 200 Rice Avenue. I never left her for a minute."

In the audience, Sister Jem touched Sister Pamela's hand. "You see?" she said. "He couldn't be the one, Sister, how could he? Let's not make things worse than they are!"

The young nun slumped in her chair, and looked toward Jacoby. The lieutenant wordlessly tried to give her the courage of her conviction, but she said:

"I guess she's right. He looks something like the man, but it's hard to be sure, it was all so confused."

Jacoby frowned and motioned to the sergeant.

"Step down, Bresson," the sergeant ordered.

Sister Pamela went to see Reverend Mother Margaret on her last day. There had been neither criticism nor argument from the Superior at her announcement of her departure; her only appeal had concerned the stolen Donatello. She had begged that Sister Pamela's decision not be affected by the crime; there was no blame attached to her mistake; it had been a mistake of trustfulness.

"No, Mother," Sister Pamela said. "It's not just that. You see, that man was right about me, that Mr. Downey."

"Mr. Downey?" The Superior pursed her lips and tried to sound charitable. "Why should anything Mr. Downey said affect you. Sister?"

"Because he told the truth. Reverend Mother. Some people retreat to God, not advance toward Him. That's what I've done. I've hidden myself away from the world, and for the wrong reasons."

"And is that so bad?" The Superior smiled tenderly. "Sometimes we do the right things for the wrong reasons. Eventually, the reasons become right too. But if I thought for a moment that this incident in a railroad station—"

"I can never forgive myself for that. Reverend Mother."

"Forgiveness is the Lord's, Sister. It was merely an error of judgment —"

"Of ignorance! I don't know the world, and you see what that ignorance did?" She lowered her head. "I'd like to say goodbye to Sister Lydia, but I'm so ashamed."

The Superior came to take her arm. "Come," she said. "We'll see her together."

The old nun was asleep when they entered the infirmary. Clara, the lay sister who nursed the sick woman, drew them away from the bedside.

"She's been asking questions," Clara whispered. "I don't know what to say to her. Reverend Mother."

"Questions?"

“About the St. Francis,” Clara said miserably, looking at Sister Pamela. “She wants to see it.”

The young nun stared. “Then she knows? She knows about Mr. Downey’s gift?”

“I’m sorry,” the Reverend Mother said. “We thought to keep it from her, but one of the lay sisters must have told her. She thinks it’s only lost or misplaced; she still thinks we’ll find it.”

“God grant we do,” Clara said tearfully. “The old darling can’t last. Reverend Mother, and it means so much to her. If she could see it before she’s called.”

Sister Pamela turned aside, and the Superior took her arm. “Don’t, Sister, don’t blame yourself all over again—” but Sister Pamela shook free of the comforting hand, and fled from the infirmary.

A day later, she put aside the stiff, heavy garments of her service and dressed in the strange, flimsy clothing whose soft textures she had almost forgotten. Then she rejoined the bewildering and untrustworthy world.

The invitation in the boardinghouse window was clear, yet the flinty eyed woman who had hand-lettered the sign looked at the applicant with disapproval.

“Did you say Miss Pamela Wiley?”

“Yes,” she answered, trying not to wilt under the gaze. She saw it travel from cheap, flat-heeled shoes to the tight-banded hat which concealed her short hair.

“It was Father McKinney at St. Mary’s who recommended your place,” she said quickly. “I just need a small room; anything will do.”

The priest’s name was a balm that softened the craggy features. The landlady almost smiled.

“Well, why didn’t you say so in the first place?”

The room was $14.00 a week, including two meals in the dismal diningroom on the first floor. The monthly total was almost the amount the church charity was contributing to Pamela’s first weeks in the outside world. She had promised herself that she would end her dependence as soon as possible; she had attained certain skills in her noviceship and she would put them to work.

Even her simple cell at the convent had been more cheerful than the room the landlady gave her with its single window and its monotonous

wallpaper of colorless roses. There was a full-length mirror on the closet door; she came across her reflection with a shock of surprise. It was the image of a pretty young woman, trim-figured even in the ill-fitting clothes. She still wore no makeup—it was an art she had yet to learn—but her unsullied complexion was fresh and smoothly lovely. And when her hair grew back. . .

She looked at herself without vanity. And for the first time since the theft of the suitcase, she began to cry.

At night, unable to sleep, she studied the pattern of light and broken plaster on the ceiling over her bed and thought of her last days at the Holy Name. To leave the convent had been one thing; she had left out of a conviction, a belief about herself as sincere as her belief in God. But to have left at such a time, with one last deed that had deprived the convent of its greatest treasure and denied old Sister Lydia of her greatest happiness. . .

She crushed the edge of the pillow in her fingers, trying not to think, but a new image kept recurring.

It was the man called Bresson.

That voice! Its timbre had made her scalp tingle the moment it came across the stage of the police lineup. It was the voice that had made the face seem familiar, made the twisted smile resemble that of the man who had betrayed her simple trust. But Sister Jem seemed so sure; her denial had made Pamela doubt the identification at once—and hadn't the man proved his innocence? There was something about a girl. . .

Pamela had spoken to Lieutenant Jacoby after the lineup. He had tried to make her do what her conscience refused to permit, to be final, conclusive.

"This alibi of his," Jacoby had said. "His witness is a girl friend. Sister—you know what that's worth."

"I can't be sure. Lieutenant," she had said miserably. "I wish I could be. I want the statue more than anything in the world, but I couldn't accuse a man who might be innocent. And Sister Jem—"

"Yes," Jacoby said, with a weary sigh. "But Sister Jem doesn't have your young eyes. Sister, remember that."

Now she was remembering, and all she could recall was the voice of the man named Bresson. Was it the same voice?

"*Can I help you, Sister?*"

"*Can I help you, Sister?*"

"*Can I help you. Sister?*"

She sat up abruptly in the bed, her face damp with perspiration.

It must be Bresson! It must be!

If she went back to Jacoby now, would it help? Could she retract her doubts, deny her own statements? It wasn't Bresson's crime she wanted punished; all she wanted was the Donatello, to see it delivered where it belonged.

She settled back against the pillow, and said a final prayer before going to sleep, for guidance, faith, and resolution.

The building was a gray monolith of triangular shape, forming a corner of the city block. The first floor was an unnerving complex of desks and offices and people who looked too busy to stop and question. It was an affable young man who helped her at last.

"A job?" he said. "Well, I guess you ought to see Mr. Meecham, he's in charge of personnel." He lifted an eyebrow, "What kind of work do you do? Secretarial?"

"Yes."

"We always seem to need typists; they're always getting married and having babies."

She let him guide her to the door of the personnel manager.

He was a phlegmatic man, bored by his work. He gave her a form to fill out and she took it to another desk. She had decided not to reveal her past, not to lie, only to omit. Where the questionnaire asked about previous employment, she wrote: none, and smiled in private enjoyment of the small joke. It was a rare smile for Pamela, and it served to make Mr. Meecham more obliging.

"We have an opening in the billing department that pays a little more," he said. "Ever learn how to use a statistical typewriter?"

"I'm afraid not; I can only do general typing."

"Well, Mrs. Ergman needs another girl. You're not married, I see. Engaged?"

"No."

"That's a relief." He returned her smile. "If it's okay with Mrs. Ergman, you could start work Monday—and I'm sure it'll be okay."

He reached into his desk drawer and withdrew a mimeographed booklet.

“This is the employee’s manual; look it over between now and Monday.”

“Thank you,” Pamela murmured, and took the booklet from his hand.

She read it on the bus going crosstown. The cover title was: INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYEES, GRAMERCY PRINTING COMPANY. There was an interoffice telephone directory in the rear of the book, and she studied the listings until she came to the one she was looking for.

BRESSON, JAMES K. Shipping Dept. . .. . .Ext. 406.

There were eight girls in the typing pool, and its supervisor was a fidgety woman with an alcoholic breath and a habit of disappearing from the floor at hourly intervals. The work was plentiful and for three weeks there was no chance of accomplishing her purpose. She formed no friendships among her co-workers. Pamela was young but these girls were younger, and their frivolous interests seemed beyond her. After the first few days, they seemed to recognize her differences; they giggled behind her back and called her “the saint.” One of them, in a moment of sympathy, taught her the sparing use of lipstick, and showed her, in a casual powder-room conversation, a simple hairstyle that would make her short auburn hair more attractive. She bought inexpensive but more flattering clothing and began to be noticeably pretty. The giggles became mixed with a little envy.

Then she saw him at last.

She was delivering a typed brochure to the lithographing department and passed the shipping room on the way back to her desk. He was loitering in the hallway, taking quick puffs on a cigarette. He stamped it out when he heard her heels clicking on the tile. She recognized him at once. He gave her the benefit of his lopsided smile.

“Hi,” he said easily.

She reddened, and her heart thudded; she didn’t fear recognition, but she was afraid.

He was looking her over appraisingly. He pulled another cigarette from the pack and asked if she had a light.

“I’m sorry,” Pamela said. “I don’t smoke.”

“I haven’t seen you around before, have I? You must be new.”

“Yes.” She hesitated. “I’m working for Mrs. Ergman.”

“That old wino?” he laughed. “Listen, you want some free advice? Buy her a bottle sometime, she’ll make things easy for you around here.”

“I have to go—”

“And don’t be an eager beaver. Nobody likes a hard worker, they make it tough on the rest of us.” He stuck the unlit cigarette in the corner of his mouth. “My name’s Jimmy,” he said. “What’s yours?”

“Pamela Wiley.”

He took her left hand and raised it toward his eyes; she winced at his touch.

“Don’t get excited. I’m just looking for the evidence.”

He studied her ringless fingers and let her go.

“Just checking,” he said. “Everything checks out fine.” He twisted the grin, making it half a leer. “Listen, you live in town? Not Queens or anything like that?”

“I live in the city. At a boarding house.”

“Maybe we could take in a movie some night.”

She brought her eyes to his face. It was a step she knew had to be taken —the heart other amorphous plan—but she couldn’t face the moment.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I’m busy tonight. I’m busy most nights.”

His face hardened swiftly, his lips closing around the cigarette. “You got something against me? Or is it the shipping department?”

“It’s not that—”

“The typing pool ain’t exactly the executive floor. Or is that what you’re hoping for?”

“Please, I didn’t mean it that way. I’ll be happy to go out with you sometime, but not right now.”

The grin came back. “Okay,” he said. “I’ll give you a call, maybe next week. What’s the extension?”

“208.”

“Okay, 208,” he chuckled. “I’ll be seeing you around.”

He telephoned her the following Monday, but the intervening days hadn’t given her the strength to accept the invitation. He sounded angry when she refused.

That night she found a letter from Sister Jem.

“*Sister Lydia,*” she wrote, “*has received Extreme Unction, but she has survived the crisis and is well enough to take some soup. However, Dr.*

Dunwoodie isn't very hopeful. . ."

The next time Jimmy Bresson called, Pamela was ready to say yes. He made the acceptance easier by the terms of the invitation.

"It's just a little party," he said. "A few friends of mine, some of'em from the company. What do you say?"

"All right," Pamela answered.

"I don't be able to pick you up. The address is 200 Rice Avenue, Apartment 4-C. Come up around nine."

When she hung up, she wrote the address on a notepad and studied it. 200 Rice Avenue—an address she had heard before, at a different time and place.

She bought a new dress for the occasion. It was black, simply cut, high-throated. When she dressed that evening, she examined the effect in the mirror and thought the result unbecoming. She was wrong; the simplicity of the dress emphasized her slimness and the glow of her white skin. Her hair was longer now, softy curling.

When she arrived at the apartment house on Rice Avenue, she searched the directory in the lobby until she found the apartment number. The name was MACKEN, B. It was the home of Jimmy Bresson's girl friend, the witness who provided him with his alibi, who lied to save him. Pamela felt a pang of bitterness just looking at the name.

Bess Macken answered the door. She was a full-breasted blonde with hard eyes darkly outlined. She was theatrical and older than Pamela thought she would be. Facing her, Pamela felt painfully innocent. Bess Macken returned an expression of resentment.

"You're Pamela, huh?" She put her hand on her hip and looked Pamela over disdainfully. Behind her, there was a burst of loud laughter and giggles. The heavy thrum of recorded music gave an air of nervous excitement to the gathering.

"Well, come in," Bess said. She took Pamela's coat and hung it in the hall closet. Then she looked at Pamela and shrugged, as if discounting her appeal, and led her inside.

Jimmy Bresson came to Pamela's side, whooping with exaggerated delight. "Well, what do you know?" he said, laughing. "If it isn't Miss Hard-to-get! Hey, look what I found!" He propelled her toward the others. "Meet Pamela," he said. "Pamela's the new girl—"

There was a confusing round of introductions, a blur of grinning faces. There were more men than women. Most were drinking beer. In the corner a couple danced, holding each other tightly and moving in a rhythm that had nothing to do with the music. Pamela looked away from them in embarrassment.

One of the girls from the typing pool was there; she looked indifferently at Pamela and whispered something to the man beside her. It seemed to increase his interest in Pamela and he came over and asked her to dance. She said no, she didn't know how, and that made the typist twitter. A man behind Pamela put his hand on her shoulder and began telling her a suggestive joke. She stopped him in the middle of it and worked her way through the crowd, trying to find her hostess.

Bess was in the kitchen, a tiny alcove off the living room. When she saw Pamela she said, "You want a drink, honey. You can have beer or whiskey."

"Nothing right now, thanks. I'd like to—freshen up."

"Right in there," Bess said.

The bathroom door was locked. Pamela turned away from it, feeling her cheeks burn. Across the room, Jimmy caught her eye and began moving toward her. She felt hot, stifled, unable to breathe. Why had she come here? What was she hopping to do here with these people?

Bresson was in front of her. He put both arms out, flattening his palms against the wall, imprisoning her in a small circle.

"So you finally broke down," he said. "About time, sister."

She laughed nervously.

"Now that's more like it," he said. "A lot more like it. We all need some laughs, don't we? Even a saint?" He grinned at her changed expression. "Yeah, I know what they call you at the office. Don't mind it, honey. Saints are okay with me. They got a way of turning into sinners."

"Please. I'm awfully warm."

"Yeah, it's hotter than an oven here. Maybe we could go for a little walk."

"Jimmy." Bess was behind them, holding a tray of glasses, her exaggerated lips narrowed. "I thought you said you were going to help."

"What? Oh, yeah, sure." He took the tray from her and tapped Pamela's shoe with the side of his. "I'll be back in a couple of minutes, honey. Hang

around."

He moved off, but Bess didn't. She stood watching Pamela's pale face, then, finding her drink on a table, she drained the glass, still watching her.

Pamela hardly knew how the party ended. The room seemed to empty all at once. The laughter died, the dancing couples disappeared—even the blaring music had become soft and muted. A man was asleep on the sofa, his shirt half-unbuttoned and his head on his chest. A girl in a vivid orange dress was tugging at his arm, trying to wake him. In the kitchen, Bess was systematically finishing the liquor in the only whiskey bottle that remained. Pamela didn't know where Jimmy was. She couldn't think. The noise, the confusion and smoke had invaded her brain until she almost felt drunk herself.

She stumbled toward the hall closet, feeling giddy and miserable. What had she gained? Nothing—nothing but a feeling that was empty and almost dirty. The front door opened and Jimmy stood looking at her. He wore a topcoat. His eyes were bleary and his crooked smile wan.

"Come on," he said thickly. "Couple of the guys are going over to the Moon Garden. It's a nice place, you'll like it."

"I'm sorry," Pamela said. "I have to be getting home."

"You can sleep all you want in the morning, it's Saturday. Hey, Ruthie, can't you get that bum awake?"

The girl in the orange dress swore, and Jimmy went to help her. He shook the drunk awake and got him into his jacket and topcoat. The girl in the orange dress, tittering, helped him out the door and down the stairs. Jimmy shut the door behind them, the last guests, and moved closer to Pamela. He caught her wrist, and pulled her towards him.

"You're a nice kid," he said. "You need some fun and games. And I know all the rules."

"Let me go," Pamela whispered.

Bess came out of the kitchen, swaying.

"You bum," she said. "You half-baked no-good bum!"

She swung her right arm at him, trying to strike his face with the back of her hand. Jimmy caught her wrist hard in mid-air and pulled it down to her side. She stumbled and almost fell.

"Let me go!" she howled. "Let me *go!*"

"You take it easy."

Bess screamed in rage and caught Bresson's hair in her left hand. He yelled and tried to push her away; she whimpered and held on. He slapped her on the jaw and she broke the grip. She staggered away from him, sobbing.

"Look!" he shouted, now at Pamela. "I don't have all night. You coming with me or aren't you?"

"I can't."

Bess was on the sofa, her face buried in the back cushion. He glared at her, and then at Pamela.

"All right," he said, breathing hard. "You two are a pair!"

He went out, slamming the front door savagely.

Bess's makeup was soiling the upholstery. Her shoulders were shaking, but when Pamela touched them solicitously she whirled and glowered at her.

"What do you want? What the hell are you hanging around for?"

"I'm sorry," Pamela said.

"Have you got a tissue?"

Pamela found one in her purse. Bess wiped her eyes and got up unsteadily and tottered toward the kitchen.

"That creep!" she said hoarsely, returning with a bottle and glass. "Oh, that zilch! You were smart not to go with him, he's nothing but trouble." She poured the last inch of whiskey out of the bottle into the glass.

"Don't," Pamela said. "Don't drink any more."

"Listen, I take enough orders!" Bess drank it in two gulps, coughed, and dropped onto the sofa again. "Everybody gives me orders," she moaned. She leaned back and closed her eyes. Pamela sat down beside her.

"Bess," she aid. "Bess, may I talk to you?"

"What?"

"Are you alone? Do you have a family?"

"My mother's dead."

"And your father?"

"That guy? He's the president of the creep society."

"I want to help you, Bess. Do you believe me?"

The woman snorted, and turned a loose grin in her direction. "Sure. Sure I do. You're the saint, ain't that right?"

Gingerly, Pamela touched Bess's limp hand. The grin faded and Bess looked almost fearful, but she didn't shake her off.

Pamela said quickly, "Tell me about Jimmy. Tell me why you put up with a man like that."

"That zilch," Bess said weepily. She fumbled for the handkerchief and blew her nose. "That's the only kind I get. All the drunks and crooks. . .he's a crook, you know that? Yeah, a two-bit crook."

"You don't mean that—"

"I don't, huh? He's a dirty thief, he'll steal you blind. Look. Look at this!" She grabbed the jeweled pin on her bosom. "Where do you think this came from? You think Jimmy'd spend his own dough on me? It came from some old lady's suitcase."

"Why would he do that? He has a job—"

"Not enough for him. Nothing's ever enough. He told me he was going straight, he got scared after they hauled him in last time. You think I believe him? He's probably down at some terminal right now."

"But why should he steal suitcases? What does he do with the things he steals?"

"Gives 'em away, sells 'em. What do you think?"

"Where, Bess? Who buys such things?"

Bess looked into Pamela's wide eyes and chuckled.

"You're a one, all right. Little Miss Innocent. You never hear of a fence, kid? Jimmy spends more time over at Wormer's place than he does at work."

"Wormer's?"

"The pawnshop." Bess put her cheek against the sofa again, her mouth dropping open. "Why don't you leave me alone, huh? I'm tired." She put her hand on her midsection and groaned. "I'm going to be sick."

Pamela leaned closer. The woman's breath was ragged, her eyes shut. Pamela spoke her name again, but Bess was silent. Then she began to snore.

Pamela stood up. She looked down at the sleeping woman, then went into the bedroom and came out with a pillow. She swung Bess's legs to the sofa, then placed the cushion under her head.

"God bless you, Bess Macken," she said softly.

Then she went to the closet, and left the apartment.

She returned to the boardinghouse with a sense of joy. Was it going to be this easy? Was the trail going to end the next morning, in the cluttered confines of a neighborhood pawnbroker? She hadn't known where her search would lead, or what she would have to do before the Donatello was recovered. Now, suddenly, the answer seemed possibly simple.

She thought she would be unable to sleep, but sleep came quickly. She woke to a gray morning and a strange feeling of voided emotion. What had made her so optimistic the night before? She dressed apprehensively, afraid to face a final disappointment.

She found Wormer's listed in the telephone directory. It was raining by the time she reached the pawnshop. She stood looking at the window display, probing the miscellaneous clutter on the chance that the statue of St. Francis might be openly displayed, but there were only cameras, battered musical instruments, microscopes, razors—a grabbag of articles far removed from the one she sought.

She went inside.

At first, there seemed to be no one in attendance. Then a man came out of the back room, a shuffling, barrel-chested man with an unkempt ring of hair around his bald head. He wore a stained vest, but no tie; his manner wasn't cordial.

"Pawn or buy?" he said.

"What?"

"You want to hock or buy something. Miss?"

"Buy," Pamela said shyly. "But I don't know if you have what I want." She looked around the room, at the guitars hanging in bunches like strung fruit, at the glass cases so dusty they obscured their contents. She was conscious of the pawnbroker's narrow gaze; she tried to be casual.

"I'm looking for something—ornamental," she said. "A statue, perhaps." She turned to meet his eyes. They were oddly hostile. "Do you have any religious objects?"

"I got rosaries," he grunted. "Jewelry. Some pictures. You tell me what you want. I'll look for it."

"A statue," Pamela said tautly. "That's what I'd really like. Do you have any religious statues?"

He shuffled down the counter, the soles of his slippers scraping against the floor.

“I’ll go check in the back. You wait here.”

He pushed aside the dingy curtain that concealed the back room. She intensified her hunt when he was gone, but found nothing. She came to the front counter and saw the thick ledgers on the stool behind it; they must contain records of his transactions. If she could examine them.

He came out from the curtain, a hint of a smile on his fleshy face. “Yeah, I think maybe I could help you. It might take a little while. Miss. You don’t mind waiting?”

“No, I don’t mind. Couldn’t—” she hesitated, not wanting to seem eager. “Couldn’t you check your ledgers? Wouldn’t they tell you?”

He came closer to her, leaning over the counter. “The ledgers is my personal business—what the hell you care about my ledgers?”

“I’m sorry. I just thought—”

He gave her a suspicious scowl, and lifted the books from the stool. He went to the back with them.

“I’ll be back,” he said. “I think I ought to have a real nice statue someplace, if I can find it. Got a real nice St. Francis in the other day—”

She caught her breath. “St. Francis?”

“Yeah. The one with the birds.” He looked at her once more before disappearing behind the curtain.

There was no place to sit down, and she was feeling faint. She leaned against an uncluttered portion of the wall and closed her eyes, her lips moving in prayer.

The pawnbroker emerged, the St. Francis in his hand. It was a thick, hairy hand, and it held the glory of the work without respect for its meaning or its loveliness. He turned it upside down and looked at the dirty white sticker on the base.

“Here it is,” he said. “It’s a real fine piece. It ain’t cheap. Miss.”

“How much?”

He put the statue on the counter, turned it around and rubbed his bristly jaw.

“Twenty dollars,” he said, darting a quick, cunning look at her.

She came to him slowly, clutching her purse. She could barely answer.

“It’s—it’s a little more than I meant to pay—”

“Look, lady, it cost me almost that much.”

“But it’s just what I want, she said. She reached out and touched the smooth surface. “Yes,” she said dreamily. “It’s exactly what I’ve been looking for.”

She put her purse down and opened it with nervous fingers.

The hairy hand closed over hers, and took the purse from the counter. She looked up, startled.

“I’ll do it for you,” the pawnbroker said. He was breathing heavily. He turned the purse over, spreading its jaws with both hands, and dumped the contents on the glass-topped counter—bills, coins, her rosary, a shower of small things struck the glass.

“What are you doing?” Pamela cried.

“I’m helping you,” the man sneered. He rummaged through the scattered objects. He picked up her cashier’s card and read it with squinting eyes. He lifted the empty purse and put his hand inside, scouring it, searching the lining.

“Please!” Pamela said, her voice shaking. “Why are you doing this? I just wanted to buy the statue—”

“Sure you did,” he grunted. He began stuffing the contents back into the bag. “And all I wanted was to check, see? In my business, we like to know who we’re dealing with. Understand?”

He looked up as the bell jangled and the front door opened.

“It’s about time,” he said. “I’ve been stalling for half an hour.”

“I came as quick as I could,” Jimmy Bresson said. He came to the counter in three strides and took the purse from the pawnbroker’s hand, not even looking at Pamela.

“Nothing. No gun, no identification. You sure she’s a cop?” the pawnbroker said.

Bresson turned slowly to face her. She was too shocked to be afraid. She moved her lips without speaking.

“I don’t know,” he said. “But she’s been acting like a cop. That’s why I told you to call me if she showed up.” He curled his fingers about Pamela’s left arm and held it tightly. “What about it, honey? You want to do a little talking?”

“Please,” she mumbled. “I just came to buy something, Jimmy. This statue. . .”

Bresson glanced at the serene bronze figure on the counter.

“You were pumping Bess,” he said. “She told me all about it when I came back last night. You never figured on that, did you?”

“I’m not with the police. I swear I’m not!”

“Then why all the questions?” He tightened his grip until she cried out. “Huh? Why all the nosing around?”

Wormer said, “Look, I don’t want any trouble in here. If this dame ain’t a cop—”

“She’s something! She’s got to be. Bess told her all about me, about where I’ve been dumping the stuff. And now she shows up here the next morning. Don’t that sound fishy to you?”

“It was the statue!” Pamela gasped. “That’s all I wanted!”

“The statue?”

Bresson looked at the St. Francis again. He picked it up, and regarded the contemplative figure in blank wonder; then he narrowed his eyes at the girl.

“The nun,” he said softly.

Wormer made a hawking noise. “What the hell is this?”

“The nun!” Bresson said. “It was in her suitcase. That’s what this one’s after. Only how did she know?”

Pamela shut her eyes. “I was the nun,” she said. “I was the one you robbed.”

Bresson’s jaw dropped.

“I left the convent over a month ago. I had to find the statue again. It was a gift from someone. It meant so much to them, to me.”

Wormer swore under his breath, and crossed himself at the same time. “Bad luck,” he said. “Bad luck robbing a nun, Jimmy, I told you that!”

“Shut up!”

Jimmy released her arm and walked around her, incredulous.

“You’re the one? You!”

“I didn’t come here to get you into trouble. I don’t want anything but the statue, Jimmy, I swear that!”

“You went to a lot of trouble, didn’t you? You took that job just to get next to me, didn’t you?”

“Yes!”

Bresson turned to the pawnbroker. “Can you tie that?” he said. “Can you figure a thing like that?” He shook the statue like a club, and rubbed

spittle form his lips with his free hand. “It must be quite a statue, huh?”

“It’s valuable—but only to the Church, only for its meaning, Jimmy. It wouldn’t do you any good.”

Wormer groaned. “A mess, a mess! I don’t like this kind of business, Jimmy, why couldn’t you be more careful?”

Bresson went back to the counter and put the statue down carefully.

“It’s valuable,” he said.

“Only spiritual!” Pamela cried. “It’s only bronze. It belongs to the convent. I wanted to see it back where it belongs. Please let me have it; I promise not to involve you.”

Wormer said uncomfortably, “Look, we can trust a nun, Jimmy, let’s let her go. Let’s get that thing out of here.”

Bresson laughed. “You jerk. You believe that junk about spiritual value? This damn thing is old. I should have seen it before. It’s maybe hundreds of years old!”

“So what? So what good is it?”

“It might be worth a fortune!”

Pamela covered her face with her hands. Now Wormer himself was interested. He looked at the St. Francis with greed widening his eyes.

“You could be right. Some of this religious stuff runs into thousands. I heard of such things.”

“We could make a deal with a collector maybe. We could handle it through Mike the Broker. He’s the guy who’ll know what it’s worth.”

“You want to bring Mike in on this?”

“Why not?” Bresson snarled. “You think you could handle it yourself, you and your nickel-and-dime business? This stuffs his specialty; he could give us a price. If we don’t like it we don’t have to sell.”

“What about the girl?”

Bresson squinted at her, and rubbed his cheek.

“That depends,” he said softly. “If it’s what I think it is. . .”

“Listen to me,” she said tearfully. “You don’t have to sell it. I’ll pay you whatever you ask; I’ll get the money somehow. You just have to trust me.”

“How much, honey? You think you could scrape up a few grand?”

“If you’ll give me time!”

Bresson grinned at the pawnbroker. “You see what I mean? It must be worth plenty. Take the Sister in the back room, Wormer, and then we’ll call

Mike. We'll tell him to come to us."

"He won't do it."

"He'll come," Bresson said cockily, "when he hears what we got for him." He stopped to peer into the tiny sculptured face of St. Francis. "I got a feeling about this one," he said crooningly. "A real good feeling, Wormer."

This is how the world ends, Pamela thought. She sat in the small stuffy room that smelled of fried grease and perspiration, her body limp in the stiff-backed chair near the cold radiator.

On the other side of the room, cross-legged in a rocker, Bresson sat and waited patiently for the broker's arrival, only vaguely intent on the day-old tabloid he was reading. He would look up and smile thinly at her now and then, and each time the front doorbell jangled he would stand tensely until Wormer took care of his patrons.

The pawnbroker came into the room, mopping at his wet, lined forehead.

"He's not coming," he said. "It's almost two hours, Jimmy. I told you he wouldn't come down here—"

"He said he would. Relax."

"It's her I'm thinking about. What if she's missed?"

"Nobody'll miss her."

"And then what? After we make the deal, what? That's the part I want to know."

"If it's a good-enough deal, it'll be worth anything."

Pamela heard the words, but they meant nothing. She was empty of feeling or reaction; if they meant to kill her, she knew she would be unable even to cry out in protest.

When another twenty minutes passed, the telephone rang. Warmer took the call, listened intently, and then covered the mouthpiece.

"He's here," he said. "He's calling from someplace in the neighborhood."

"Double-checking," Bresson grinned. "He's a wise old fox, that Mike. Tell him everything's okay, he can come over. He won't be sorry."

Warmer leaned over the telephone.

Five minutes later, the front doorbell jangled.

Warmer went to answer it, and returned with a tall, white-haired man in a bulky alpaca. He came into the room ahead of the pawnbroker, his rubber-tipped cane thumping lightly on the floor. He appraised his surroundings swiftly and with quick contempt; then his hawk's eyes came to rest on the girl. They flickered momentarily. Pamela returned the gaze and opened her mouth in the beginning of an exclamation, but his eyes were speaking now, telling her something, bidding her to silence.

"Well?" Mike grunted. "It's a pretty little picture. Only I came forty miles for this, so make it fast and good. Who's the girl?"

"She's a nun," Bresson said. "A nun, Mike, no kidding!" He spoke nervously, deferentially.

"Don't give me that. Since when do nuns wear lipstick? And my name isn't Mike. It's Mr. Downey to you, Bresson."

"She left the convent, and she's been after me for this statue. Mr. Downey, you wouldn't believe what she did! That's how I knew it was valuable!"

"What statue?"

Bresson snapped his fingers at Warmer. The pawnbroker lifted the St. Francis tenderly and brought it over.

"We thought it might be worth plenty, Mr. Downey," he said. "We figured you were the one who'd know. If you think it's worth something, we could make a deal."

"Only we want good terms," Bresson said. "We want a straight cut, Mr. Downey, fifty-fifty—"

"Not so fast."

The broker examined the statue, then he took his eyes from the sculpture to look at the girl.

"And what about her? Is she in on the deal?"

Bresson laughed. "She was kind of like the middleman, Mr. Downey, only there's no cut for her."

"And what happens to her later?"

"We'll take care of it, Mr. Downey, you can trust us."

"I'll bet I can."

The big man unbuttoned his coat and reached into an inner pocket for a pair of spectacles. He put them on and studied the bronze more intently. Bresson and the pawnbroker watched him tensely.

Downey turned it to every angle. He scratched his thumbnail over its patina and brought it directly under the naked lightbulb dangling from the middle of the ceiling.

Then he hefted it and turned to Wormer.

"You had this thing on sale?"

"Sure, Mr. Downey, only that was before I knew—"

"How much?"

"What?"

"What were you pricing it at?"

Bresson chuckled. "Look, we didn't know any better, we thought it was just a hunk of metal—"

"I was gonna sell it for twenty bucks," Wormer laughed. "Can you imagine, a thing like that?"

Downey walked deliberately to Wormer's side and shoved the statue against his barrel chest. Wormer grunted, and blinked stupidly.

"You're a crook, Wormer," Downey said. "The cheapest crook there is. That piece of junk isn't worth a nickel. Melt it down for scrap, maybe it's worth two bucks. Next time you want to handle junk, call a junk dealer." He poked his finger in Wormer's ribs. "Only don't call Mike. You understand?"

He turned on his heel and headed for the doorway. Bresson leaped in front of him, grabbing his arm.

"You're out of your head! It's gotta be worth something! This dame went to so much trouble—"

"Look, Bresson," Downey said angrily, "you don't have to teach me my business. I say it's a piece of trash. If it was worth something. I'd handle it —that's my livelihood. But it's a cheap copy of something that wasn't any good in the first place. There are a million of them floating around the country, you couldn't sell it to a five-and-dime if you polished it up for a year. Now get out of my way!"

Bresson shook his head in disbelief.

"But the nun—"

Downey chuckled. "That's what you get for being so stupid, Bresson. Don't you know nuns aren't people? They're not smart. They don't understand about money. They'll kill themselves over a scrap of junk just because it was blessed. You'd be amazed all the dumb things nuns do, and they don't get a nickel for it. They're the biggest suckers in the world!" He

turned to look at Pamela. “And if you’ll take my advice, you’ll let this one out of here. She’s liable to say a prayer and send you all to hell. Not that you don’t deserve it.” He laughed and stepped past Bresson to the door.

When the bell jangled again out front, Wormer groaned.

“Now what?” he said. “What do we do now, Bresson?”

Bresson chewed his lip, and went to Pamela.

“Listen!” he said savagely. “You listen to me!”

“I’m listening, Jimmy.”

“We’re letting you go. But I swear I’ll kill you if you turn me in—” He paused, and smiled thinly. “No. I’ll kill that stupid Bess, that’s what I’ll do. You wouldn’t like, to have that happen, would you. Sister?”

“You don’t have to worry. I said I wouldn’t give you away. All I ever wanted was the statue.”

He scowled. Then he went to the pawnbroker and grabbed the statue rudely from his hands.

“Here,” he said, shoving it at her. “Now you got what you wanted. Get the hell out of here and leave me alone.”

She took the image and pressed it to her breast.

“I’ll pray for you, Jimmy,” she said.

She went to the doorway and parted the curtain. Wormer came up behind her.

“Sister—” he said.

“Yes?”

He grinned foolishly. “For me, too, sometime, huh? A prayer for me.”

“Yes,” Pamela said. “For you, too.”

She came out into the rain-swept street. There was a long black automobile at the curb. Its driver tapped the horn lightly for her attention. The back door opened, and Downey called to her.

“Come on. Sister,” he said. “I’ll drive you home.”

She smiled, and then, seeing the raindrops on the Donatello, she placed the statue of St. Francis underneath her coat and ran to the car. She climbed into the seat beside him, and Downey leaned toward the driver.

“The Holy Name,” he said.

Blood Bargain

Aired: October 25, 1963

Teleplay by Henry Slesar

Directed by Bernard Girard

Starring: Richard Kiley and Anne Francis

Derry packed his bag, loaded his gun, and got off the train. In the terminal waiting room, he pulled a pair of yellow chamois gloves on and off his hands. A blind man couldn't have missed him, but it was almost an hour before the man with sunken cheeks and a cracked toothpick in his mouth spotted him. He sat on the bench beside him, and said: "Nice day for the horses, ain't it?"

"What kept you?" Derry said. "I don't like being kept waiting."

"You tell that to Harney. Harney said you were coming by plane. We just got your wire an hour ago."

"I don't take planes on Friday. I don't need the hard luck. Besides," Derry smiled, "I like a shave before I get into town. I like to look my best."

Harney's man scowled, and led him to a taxi.

Harney worked out of a moving and storage warehouse on the east side. The rumor was that Harney's wife owned the legitimate half of his business; the wire joint was Harney's own enterprise. Derry didn't ask any pertinent questions as they bumbled their way to the third floor in the creaking elevator. His escort rattled open the gate.

"After you, pal."

Derry stepped into the room. It was a mile square, hollow-sounding under his heels, and the light folding chairs covered the floor like a convention of insects. The big board on the wall didn't have any quotations yet; it was too early. There were four television sets and half a dozen radios; the desks, littered with telephones, were unmanned.

He was shown into the private office. It was a plush, padded cell, and Rupert Harney was the plush, padded occupant of the swivel chair. He seemed to enjoy being fat. He kept rubbing the swell of his body under the nicely tailored gray suit. He had a squeezed up, bitter mouth, like a man sucking a lemon.

"It's about time," Harney grunted. "What's the idea taking a train? I hire somebody, I expect them to follow orders."

Derry took off his yellow gloves and dropped them on the desk. “You want to grouse or you want to talk?” he said, sitting down.

“All right,” Harney said. “So talk.”

“My price is five grand for the hit. I do good clean work. I pick my own time and place. Any questions?”

“My friend in the cannery recommended you.”

Derry’s face darkened. “I don’t do that union stuff anymore, only private cases. I figure I’m a working stiff, too. Why should I hurt another one?”

“This is private. The mark’s a guy named Eddie Breech.”

“What have you got against him?”

“Since when is that your business?”

Derry shrugged. “That’s up to you.”

“Breech used to work for me,” Harney scowled. “He covered the best slice of territory in the city. His receipts were like five grand a week. Only they started to drop, understand? Four one week, two the next, the whole thing smelled bad. I added things up and came to a conclusion. Anything else you want to know?”

“You mean he’s a crook?” Derry laughed. “That makes me feel better. I hate crooks, don’t you, Mr. Harney?”

“I thought I was hiring a gun, Derry, not a comedian.”

“Life’s short, Derry grinned. “We can all use a laugh.”

“I’ll laugh,” Harney said grimly. “I’ll laugh when Breech has dirt in his mouth. Earl, the guy who picked you up, he’ll finger Breech for you. See if you can make if fast, and see that I’m kept out of it. That’s all.”

“Not all, Mr. Harney,” Derry said amiably. “In cases like this, we like a deposit.”

Harney sneered, and stripped bills from a wallet as fat as he was. Derry counted five hundred, nodded, and stuffed them into his pocket. Then he put on his yellow gloves.

Earl met him outside, with a fresh toothpick dancing in his teeth.

Eddie Breech lived spank in the middle of the silk stocking district where his horseplaying customers came from, only the apartment house was a little less fashionable than its neighbors. Derry, sitting beside Earl in the parked car across the street, looked up and counted windows.

“Five o’clock,” he said. “I thought you said he’d be coming back by now?”

“Usually does, Friday. He takes his wife to see the doctor every Friday afternoon.”

“You didn’t tell me he was married.”

Earl’s mouth twisted. “Make any difference?”

“Sure,” Derry grinned. “I like making rich widows.”

A Buick with a high shine was pulling up to the front entrance. Earl reached into the glove compartment for a pair of binoculars and handed them to Derry. He focused them.

The man who stepped out from behind the wheel was short, broad-shouldered, and nattily attired. The doorman came running out to help him. He opened the rear door and started yanking something from the back. Breech, meanwhile, was helping a woman out of the front. It seemed like a well-rehearsed routine, and Derry observed it curiously. Then he saw what was happening. The object in the back was a wheelchair. The woman in front was Breech’s wife, and she couldn’t use her legs.

Derry jerked the binoculars up to his eyes. He saw the back of Breech’s head as he lifted the woman out of the car. She put her arms around his neck. He trained the lenses on her face, and his gaze stuck there. She was blonde, so blonde that her hair was almost white. Her skin was even whiter. She was a ghost, a beautiful spook.

“Get a good picture?” Earl said.

“What?” Derry looked at him stupidly. Then he lifted the glasses again, and caught Eddie Breech’s profile. Breech was good-looking, with a sullen, pouting boyish mouth.

They had the woman in the chair now, and were wheeling her into the building. Earl turned on the ignition.

“Where you staying?” he asked.

Derry had to think. “Er, Gracey Hotel, 44th Street.” He looked out the window. “How come Breech married a cripple?”

“He didn’t,” Earl sneered. “The dame was in one piece when he married her. It was all Eddie’s fault, what happened. They got into an argument and he belted her. She fell down a flight of stairs and busted something in her back.”

“Sounds like a real nice guy. It’ll be a pleasure to do business with him.”

“Yeah, well don’t forget. You’re doin’ this for Harney, not for the dame.”

“I won’t forget,” Derry said, fingering the bills in his pocket.

The Gracey Hotel had what Derry wanted. Twenty bucks a day and anonymity. He lowered the shades, took a drink from the flask in his suitcase, and went to bed. He shut his eyes and saw the blonde’s face. He opened them, and traced a crack in the ceiling. Shut them and saw the blonde again. He turned over and pushed his face into the pillow. Thought of her. He cursed, turned on the bedside lamp, and smoked a cigarette. After a while, he fell asleep, wondering what her name was.

He found out the next day. He made a bar survey in Breech’s neighborhood. The closest was called the Lucky Star. He walked in and bought a drink and some conversation.

“Yeah, sure,” the bartender said. “I know Mr. Breech, he’s a good customer. Listen, if you ever want to bet—”

“Too bad about his wife, huh?”

“He brings her in sometimes, you know that? She’s a real lady, Mrs. Breech. He treats her good.”

“Yeah?” Derry said dryly. “The way I heard it. Breech is the one who put her in the wheelchair.”

“I wouldn’t know about that. But he treats her okay, believe me. Always pushing her chair around, buyin’ her stuff. He takes her to the doctor’s for treatments once a week. I mean, cripple or not, that’s my idea of a happy marriage.”

Derry snorted, slapped a bill on the bar, and started out. He turned for one last question, her name.

“He calls her Connie,” the bartender said.

By Wednesday, Derry had his plan formulated. It was simple and direct, and that’s how he liked it. Eddie Breech had a habit of parking his car on a side street a block from the apartment house. He used it at odd hours, so Derry had to hang around and wait.

At eight-thirty on Wednesday night, he was stationed in the doorway of a dry cleaners when Breech came down the street, heading for his Buick, alone. Derry saw him unlock the car door and climb behind the wheel. He

stepped out of the shadows, opened the side door swiftly, and dropped into the front seat with the gun already in his hand. It was quick, clean, efficient.

Breech gawked at him, his boyish mouth open.

"What the hell," he said. "What do you want?"

"Start the car," Derry said. "Head west to the highway. Keep going until I tell you to stop."

"Listen, I don't have five bucks on me—"

"Start the car!"

Breech turned the key, and they pulled away from the curb. When they reached the highway, Derry guided him north. Breech drove erratically, the wheel jiggling in his hand. Derry cursed, but that only made Breech more nervous.

"Did Harney send you?" he said. "Is that what it is?"

"Keep driving, pal."

"You going to kill me?"

Derry didn't answer.

"Look, let's talk a deal! If Harney sent you. I'll give you twice the dough. Just tell me what it is!"

"How do you know it was Harney?" Derry said. "Maybe it was your wife. Harney's not the only one who hates your guts, am I right?"

"Connie? You're crazy! Connie needs me—"

"Needs you for what? To belt her again?"

"Who told you about that?"

"You must have been a pretty brave boy. Slugging a woman, that takes courage."

"I'm trying to make it up to her!" Breech shouted. "For God's sake, will you give me a chance to make it up to her? That's why I needed that dough, that's the only reason—"

"So you did cheat Harney, huh?"

"I'd cheat my grandmother if it helped Connie!" He looked at Derry and snarled. "You wouldn't understand that—"

"Keep your eyes where they belong," Derry said.

They took the first side road past the toll booths. Derry ordered him to stop the car. At the wheel. Breech slumped forward, breathing hard, his eyes glassy.

"Go on," he muttered. "Get it over with."

Derry fingered the revolver in his pocket.

"How were you helping her?" he said.

"What?"

"How were you helping your wife? This doc you see every week. Did he say something could be done?"

Breech put his forehead on the wheel.

"No," he said, his voice muffled. "The spinal cord's severed. All he can do is make her more comfortable."

"Maybe she'd be better off without you."

"Maybe she would," Breech said.

Derry looked at him for a moment, and then brought his hand out of his pocket, without the gun.

"Turn the car around," he said. "We're going back to your place."

As Breech put the key in the lock, Derry heard the scudding of the wheelchair coming towards the door. As it opened, the woman was there, her large sea-green eyes vivid in the white face, looking up with surprise and curiosity.

"I didn't expect you so early, Eddie—"

"This is a friend," Breech growled. "I met him downstairs and we got talking."

Connie looked at Derry; the white glow other face made him feel hot and uncomfortable. "Let me get you a drink," she said brightly, putting her hands on the wheels. "Eddie says I'm the best rolling bartender in town—watch me."

"That won't be necessary, Mrs. Breech." Derry undid the buckle of his raincoat and took a seat. "Let's all sit down and talk," he said.

Connie looked at Breech, who grimaced. "Do as he says," he told her. "It's his show."

Connie sought Derry's eyes, questioningly.

"I work for Rupert Harney," he said carefully. "Harney is sore at your husband, Mrs. Breech. He thinks he cheated him in business."

"Oh, my God," the woman said.

"It's not true," Breech said. "I got a right to go into business myself."

"Not with Harney's clientele." Derry turned to the woman. "Harney's sore. And when Mr. Harney's sore, he only knows one remedy. Tonight, this could have been it."

He reached into his pocket and removed the revolver. He put it noiselessly on the table.

Connie sobbed, and covered her face.

"I never did anything more stupid in my life," Derry said, "than what I'm doing right now."

"I told you I'd pay—" Breech snapped.

Derry glared at him. "You think it's that easy? You think Harney will be satisfied just because I welshed? Think again, mister. If I walk off this job, somebody else walks in. There's always another gun around."

"Then what can we do?"

Derry crossed his legs, and leaned back.

"There's only one thing. The job has to be finished."

"Hey—"

"Don't get in an uproar. The job has to be done only as far as Rupert Harney is concerned. That means you've got to play dead, Eddie."

"Maybe if we left town. Maybe Mexico—"

"That won't do it," Derry said disgustedly. "Harney won't be satisfied with a disappearance. Harney is going to want a body."

Derry leaned forward.

"There's a way," he said. "I'll have to stick my neck out to do it, and there'll be expenses. But there's a way."

"What kind of expenses?"

"I'll let you know." Derry stood up, buckling the raincoat again. "If it happens, it'll happen fast. Get a bag packed and keep it ready, then make up your mind about leaving the country. Get some standby reservations. Don't leave the apartment or let strangers in." He looked at the revolver on the coffee table. "And keep this," he said. "Just in case of trouble."

The woman looked up. "How can we thank you?"

"By obeying orders," Derry said.

Then he went out.

He called Joe Figaro at the funeral parlor, and Figaro sounded vague and reluctant. He taxied to the undertaker's, and saw why Figaro sounded different; he had turned prosperous, conservative, and timid in his old age.

"Look, Derry," Figaro said nervously, "the old days are over. I make more money legal now than I used to crooked. For me, crime don't pay, like it says on the posters."

Derry laughed. “This is legitimate,” he said. “Almost legitimate. I want to make a purchase.”

“What kind?”

“You’re the only store in town that has what I want, Joe. Or you know where I can get it. I want a body.”

Twenty minutes of argument, protest, and haggling followed. When Derry left the undertaker’s, he knew that Joe would come through for him. There were half a dozen ways he could detour a corpse from the funeral home, and Joe knew them all. He went back to the Gracey Hotel, and waited.

Joe called him at noon the next day.

“All set,” he said. “The body’s a short, heavy cookie, maybe fifty years old, full of mustaches. Does it matter?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Derry said. “When can I take delivery?”

“Tonight. You could bring your car around to the back of my place, say around eleven o’clock.”

“I’ll be there,” Derry promised.

He went to see the Breeches. Eddie was starting to drink early, and he was growling with irritation. Connie Breech was calm.

“Everything’s ready,” he told them. “You’re going to be a dead man by tomorrow morning. You can leave town tonight if you can get a plane.”

“There’s one leaving at nine, for Mexico City. We got standby reservations. What’s it going to cost me, what you’re doing?”

“A grand. Some jewelry. And that Buick of yours.”

“But I need a car—”

“You won’t need it in Mexico. They got donkeys.”

“Listen to him, Eddie,” Connie pleaded. “Please listen to him.”

“Give me your wallet, your watch, any jewelry you carry,” Derry said. “Is that wedding ring inscribed? Good, let’s have it.”

“What’s the idea?”

“There’s going to be a body in your car tonight. It’s going to be burned pretty badly. But nobody’s going to have any doubts about who it is. Understand now?”

“A body?” Connie shivered.

“Don’t worry, the guy’s already dead, it won’t hurt a bit. Meanwhile, make sure you get out of town as fast as you can. When that body is found,

you're supposed to be dead. I don't want you around, making me out a liar."

"That's right," Eddie sneered. "You'd lose your dough, wouldn't you? The money Harney's paying you."

"Eddie!" the woman said painfully.

"It's all right, Mrs. Breech," Derry told her. "Just see that your husband does what I say. I'll take the money and that jewelry now, pal. And the car keys."

Eddie Breech turned them over.

He drove the Buick to Joe Figaro's place at ten minutes to eleven. Figaro opened up the back, and then asked him inside. The corpse was sheet-covered, and Derry pulled it back to see the blank, indignant face of the man whose visit from death seemed to have come as a surprise. Derry put Breech's watch, ring, and tie-clip on the body, and then they carted it outside on a stretcher.

Derry paid the undertaker, five hundred in cash. Then he drove away.

He was ten miles out of town, half a mile from a roadside motel, when he found the side road suitable for the deed. He put Breech's wallet in the glove compartment, and then dragged the body to the front seat. It was a job propping it up behind the wheel.

Then he went to the trunk and removed two cans of gasoline. He uncapped them both, and sprayed both car and body generously. He stepped out, opened the front door wide, and lit a match. He flung it into the corpse's lap, and ran brokenly from the scene before the gasoline fire spread. He was out of sight of the car by the time the flames hit the gas tank. The treetops were illuminated by the lightning of the explosion.

He walked to the motel and registered. When he was alone in the cabin, he fell into bed with his clothes on and slept heavily.

In the morning, Derry got a local hack to take him into the city. He was dropped three blocks from Harney's storage and warehouse building.

When he walked into the bookie's office, Harney stood up behind the desk and every pound quivered nervously.

"It's over," Derry said.

"How'd you do it? Tell me the details."

Derry lit a cigarette, holding up the match until the flame reached his fingers.

“I did it like this,” he said. “Just like this. If you want to see what’s left, take a drive out on Route 6 and turn left on Potter Valley Road. There’s not much left of the car. Or your pal Eddie Breech, for that matter.”

Harney swallowed, and sat down.

“I suppose you want your money,” he said.

“That’s the general idea.”

Derry left with the cash bulging in his billfold. Five thousand, plus the five hundred extra from Breech, made a handsome total. He felt good. Rich, clean, and good.

He wasn’t half a block from the warehouse building when he heard two pairs of heels clicking behind him. He tensed up expectantly, sensing trouble. But it was on him before he could act; the two men that were following him had him flanked and helpless. He stayed calm.

“Your name William Derry?” one of them said.

“Yeah, that’s right.” He turned to look at them, one at a time. The man on the left urged him forward by grasping his elbow. The grip was firm, authoritative.

“Keep moving, Derry, we got a warrant for your arrest.”

“Me? You’re making a mistake—”

“Keep moving!”

There was a car at the curb, waiting for them. Derry, who had been arrested several times in his career, but never convicted, didn’t act scared.

“What’s it all about?” he said casually. “What’s the beef?”

“You’ll hear all about it, Derry.”

He heard more than he expected to hear. At police headquarters, they brought him to the office of a lieutenant named Geer. Geer was a craggy-featured man with a hoarse voice and no small talk.

“You know a man named Rupert Harney?”

“I met him once or twice.”

“That’s not what we know, Derry. We understand that Harney paid your way into town a week ago. Is that right?”

“I can afford my own carfare. Lieutenant.”

“But this was something special, wasn’t it? He hired you to do a special job for him. You see,” Geer said grimly, “there isn’t much we don’t know about Harney. For your information, the D.A.’s office has been lining up a

case against your bookie friend for the last six months. It was your hard luck to come into the picture right now."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Geer pulled out a notebook.

"Derry arrived Friday," he read. "He was brought in by Harney to knock off a guy named Eddie Breech. Breech worked for Harney, but had been taking bets on his own hook. Derry's price for the job was five grand. Derry was staying at a hotel called the Gracey. He didn't say how he was going to kill Breech."

Geer looked up.

"That sound correct to you, Derry? It's part of a confession we got a couple of hours ago from somebody who knows you and Harney both. The guy who spilled was on the spot. He's turning state's evidence to get a lighter rap. He'll probably get one, too."

Derry thought of Earl's vapid face, the toothpick stuck in his bad teeth, and cursed inwardly.

"You can help yourself the same way, Derry. You can tell us where Eddie Breech is now. We checked on his apartment and nobody's home. His wife, too. She's a cripple, Derry, I guess you know that. Did you take care of her, too?"

Derry smiled.

"All right," he said. "I'll tell you what you want to know."

They gave him his first cigarette, and a cup of water.

"Sure," he said. "I was hired to kill Eddie Breech. Harney sent for me and gave me the assignment. He wanted Breech killed for cheating on him. I told Harney that I never did this kind of work—" Geer sniffed audibly, but didn't interrupt. "But I said I'd do it."

"How'd you manage it? Where's Breech's body?"

"You won't find a body. Not Eddie Breech's, anyway. I went to Breech and told him the whole story, him and his wife. I felt sorry for them. I said that I wouldn't do them any harm, but that this didn't mean they were safe. Harney would just hire somebody else to do the job."

"That was nice of you," Geer said sourly.

"I said the only thing to do was make it look as if Breech was killed. I said I would arrange everything for them."

"And that's what you did?"

“I got a body, a dead body, from an undertaking parlor I know. I put the body in Breech’s car. Then I drove it out on Route 6 and pulled it off a side road called Potter Valley. I doused the car with gasoline and set it on fire. You’ll find Breech’s watch and ring on the body—but it won’t be Breech.”

Geer was shaking his head slowly.

“I don’t get it. Why’d you feel so sorry for the guy?”

“Because of his wife. He hurt her once, made her a cripple. Now he was trying to help her. That’s why he cheated Harney out of the money, to help his wife. Hell, I might have done the same thing myself.”

“Very touching,” Geer said dryly. “The only trouble is, it’s not true.”

“What?”

“Oh, Eddie was responsible for his wife’s injury. He knocked her down a flight of stairs once. But you know why?”

“They had an argument—”

“Yeah, an argument. She caught him with another woman, a gal named Greta Damon. And if you think Breech gave her up after that, you’re nuts. He’s been cheating on his wife ever since; the fact that she was in a wheelchair only made it easier. And his wife knew; that was the tough part; she knew all about it.”

Derry’s face clouded.

“It doesn’t matter now,” he said grimly. “Nothing matters. They’re on their way to Mexico, right now—”

“You’re a liar, Derry.”

“What?”

“You tell a nice story. Nice and touching. But I got a different one.”

Derry stared dumbly at him.

“You made a deal with Breech,” Geer said. “He gave you a thousand bucks, and you arranged this phoney car accident for him. But you intended to collect from both sides, didn’t you, pal?”

“That’s a lie! I was helping him get away!”

“Is that so?”

Geer whipped a paper from his desk.

“Eddie Breech, 29, male, white, found shot to death in his apartment at 704 East 73rd Street. The bullets came from a .38 Smith and Wesson, found at the scene. The gun is registered in the name of William Derry. That’s how you got that five grand from Harney, Derry. By doing your job.”

“It’s not true! Breech took the plane! He’s on the plane!”

“He’s in the morgue,” Geer said harshly. “Constance Breech told us the whole story. She was in the bedroom when she heard the shots. She came out and saw you standing there, holding the gun, wearing those lousy yellow gloves. She screamed, and you dropped the gun, and ran out.”

Geer bent closer, his jaw almost touching Derry’s cold white face.

“You should have killed her, too, Derry. That’s where you made your mistake. You shouldn’t have been so soft-hearted.”

Derry shut his eyes; as always, he saw the woman. Pale, golden-haired, a beautiful ghost.

“No,” he said. “You’re right about that.”

Starring The Defense

Aired: November 15, 1963

Teleplay by Henry Slesar

Directed by Joseph Pevney

Starring: Richard Basehart

Miles Crawford, deep in a dream of the past, was sprawled in the library armchair and looking boyish, gray hairs and all, boyish. Jenny, his maid, clucked over him maternally before shaking him awake.

"Mr. Crawford? You know Mr. Brody been outside half an hour? You forget he was coming over?"

"Sam?" Miles got to his feet, agile for his sixty years, and went to the door. "What the hell are you doing out there? Why didn't you wake me?"

On the sofa, Sam Brody looked up with bloodhound eyes and raised his glass in salute. "You're an old man," he said. "You need your rest."

"Look who's talking," Miles grunted, and went to pick up a heavy wool sweater from the back of his chair. "Jenny!" he bellowed. "Turn up the thermostat, it's an icebox in this room!" He flopped into a seat and shivered. "What do you say, Sam? You and me for the golden west this year?"

"Phooey," Sam said. "What do you take me for? I let you within ten miles of a movie camera, you'll be talking about comebacks. Stick with the law business, it's not so bad."

"We're not getting rich at it," Miles grumbled. "You know I settled the Dearborn case today? The old lady who smashed his car offered $300, and he took it. The court will probably award us a hundred if we're lucky."

"What do you expect in a town like this? You want big-money cases, you picked the wrong partner."

"I got the right partner," Miles said, smiling. "Who else loses at gin rummy like you do? Come on, let's crack a deck."

Miles, chuckling, padded over to the breakfront and took a fresh pack of cards from the top drawer. He was slitting the seal when they heard the front door slam, and he exchanged a look with Sam that communicated curiosity and concern.

"Must be Tod," he whispered. "Funny. It's still early."

He walked rapidly to the front hallway. It was Tod, all right, and his concern deepened at the sight of his son's blanched face. Tod was in his

early twenties, lightboned like Miles, but half a head taller. He had the brown eyes of his mother. Miles' second wife Elena, but the deep sockets that hid their brown warmth were Miles'.

"What's this, a new leaf?" Miles said, with forced levity. "Only ten o'clock and home already?"

Tod was holding the elbow of his left arm. He looked at his father sullenly, but didn't answer. Then he went to the staircase that rose steeply to the second floor of the house.

"Tod!" (Keep the anger out. Miles said to himself, you know this moody kid.) "You could at least answer me. Just a word?"

"I'm going up," Tod said.

He did, and in a hurry, and Miles heard the slam of his bedroom door. He turned to find Sam beside him, sharing the worry. "What's up?" Sam said. "The kid all right?"

"Sure he's all right," Miles snapped. "Like a tiger's all right, after it takes a chunk out of you. Don't you know my son by now?"

Sam walked over to the stairs.

"Well, let's go, what are you waiting for?" Miles said furiously. "You came to play cards, let's play!"

"Miles," Sam said.

"What is it?"

"Take a look. Am I crazy, or is somebody bleeding around here?"

Miles went to him, stooped where he stooped, touched the carpet where he touched, and looked dumbly at the red stain on his fingertips. Then he backtracked the boy's footsteps to the front door and saw the other crimson traces.

Sam said: "You want me to come up with you?" Miles shook his head. He took the steps two at a time, and didn't make the customary hesitation at the door of Tod's room. He was never fully welcome here, but now he walked in without invitation.

Tod had stripped off his jacket and was coming out of the bathroom. His left shirt sleeve had been rolled, and there was a white towel wrapped about the forearm. He looked at his father sharply, critical of the intrusion, but there was also a commingling of guilt and shame in his eyes. The towel became some sort of indecent, humiliating object.

"What happened?" Miles said. "How did you hurt yourself?"

“Scratch,” Tod mumbled. “Little car accident, nothing serious. Would you mind. Pop! I feel like hitting the sack.”

“That’s no scratch,” Miles said. “It’s bleeding pretty bad. Let me see it.”

He put his hand out, and Tod whirled away. “I said it’s nothing! Will you stop picking on me?” The towel edge flapped over, and Miles saw the termination point of the wound. He winced, and gestured helplessly.

“Let me call a doctor. You could get blood poisoning from that. How did it happen? Did you hit somebody?”

“The car’s all right.”

“I’m not asking about the car! I want to know what happened!” He stepped forward too quickly to be avoided and grasped the boy’s shoulder. “What kind of accident. Tod?”

“All right! It wasn’t an accident. It was a fight!”

“A fight? What kind of a fight?”

“Like any other kind!”

There were thumpings outside; Sam, breathing heavily, was coming up to the landing. “Miles,” Sam was saying, trying to breathe and talk at the same time, and too short-winded for both. “Miles, you better come down here.”

“What is it?”

Sam leaned in the doorway, panting. “Car pulled up, police car. They’ll be in the driveway in a minute. Is Tod okay?” He searched the room with his weak eyes. Tod was pacing now, making noises in his throat.

“Police?” Miles said. He glared at his son accusingly. “A little fight, huh? For God’s sake. Tod, what did you do?”

“Nothing, I told you!”

“Miles,” Sam said, “you better come down.”

“I’m coming. I’m coming!”

They went down the stairs together. Tod didn’t trouble to close the door after them. By the time they reached the front hallway, the doorbell was ringing.

The officer was polite. “This the home of Tod Crawford? Excuse me, Mr. Crawford, is your son home? Little trouble on Route 4. Well, no, maybe more than a little. For questioning.”

Then they were in the house, both of them, polite still but wary, hands leaning on the shiny leather gun belts.

“Tod!” Miles shouted. “Tod, come down.” When there wasn’t any answer, he looked at Sam pleadingly, sharing fearful thoughts about what Tod might do.

Then Tod appeared. He surveyed them from the second floor railing, the towel knotted around his wounded arm, his jacket slung over his right shoulder. He had the sneer of a movie tough on his face, but Miles knew a performance when he saw one. Behind Miles, one of the officers snapped the button on his holster. But there wasn’t going to be any trouble. Tod was coming down.

“Your name Tod Crawford?”

“That’s right.”

“Listen officer—” Miles came between them, and the patrolmen frowned and shifted uncomfortably and asked him not to interfere. Tod thought that was funny; he smiled at this ironical twist.

“Don’t you know my old man?” he said. “Don’t you know Miles Crawford, the movie star?” He made them glance at Miles, but the glance was empty of interest or recognition. “It’s okay,” Tod said. “I won’t give you a hard time. Should I take some things with me?”

“What did he do?” Miles said. “For God’s sake, you can’t just drag him out of here without an explanation! Have you got a warrant?”

“Yes, sir, we have a warrant. Your son got into trouble with a boy named Jules Herman, they had a fight out on Route 4. The boy was cut up pretty bad.”

“How bad?” Miles said.

“Take some overnight stuff,” the other officer told Tod. “Your father can bring you anything else you need in the morning. Sorry, but we got to be going now.”

“Wait, wait!” Miles said quickly. “I’m coming with you.” He reached the hall closet in two strides and began fumbling for his coat. “Where are we going? What’s your precinct?”

“Eighth Precinct, Mr. Crawford, only you’ll have to take your own car. Maybe you’d be better off waiting until morning, nothing much is going to happen tonight.”

“I’m coming with you!” Miles said. “Don’t worry,” he told Tod. “I’ll get your things for tonight. Then we’ll get you out on bail first thing tomorrow.”

“Mr. Crawford—” Miles blinked at the officer. “Look, don’t count on too much. About bail and all that. I mean you’re a lawyer, you know about these things.”

“What do you mean?”

“This boy, this Jules Herman, he’s dead.”

Sam gripped Miles shoulder, hard. “You’re not driving,” he said. “I’ll drive you to the precinct, myself. You’re a terrible driver, even at the best of times. Come on. Miles.”

Sam went to get his coat. Miles had to be led out of the house like a child.

It was after two A.M. when they returned home. They had accomplished little. They hadn’t even seen Tod; he had been booked, fingerprinted, and shut away like a quarantine case. A detective named Raphael had given them ten minutes of his time, but they hadn’t learned much more than the bare cold facts. Tod and two other youths had been out on a drinking and driving spree; not the first. There had been an argument; it had been settled on the side of the road, with four-inch knife blades. Tod had won the argument, and Jules Herman, the loser, was stretched out in the precinct freezer while his divorcee mother wept over his body and blamed her louse of a husband. Now they were back home, and Miles was blaming himself.

“What could I do?” he said, imploring his law partner. “What could I have done different? You know what kind of crazy life I led, Sam. First that Hollywood business, then the Crash, then that nickel-and-dime law office I opened.”

“Cut it out,” Sam growled. “Don’t eat your heart out. What good does it do?”

“Then came the divorce from Elena. That didn’t make it easier. You know that’s why I married again, for Tod’s sake. You know that, Sam.”

“Yeah,” Sam said, his bloodhound eyes downcast.

“All right. Fern wasn’t a mother type, but you think she didn’t try? He’s a moody kid, moody and sullen. I couldn’t blame her for giving up.”

“You ought to be in bed,” Sam said.

“I thought things would be different after I was through with pictures. I thought I’d give him a nice, normal life. But this coldness in him, Sam, it’s like a chronic disease. That’s why he drinks so much. They said he was

drunk tonight, he didn't know what he was doing. That'll be in his favor, won't it?"

"You know the law. Miles. Drunk or sober, juries don't like murderers."

Miles pounded the coffee table with his fist. "I'll talk to them myself, Sam, I'll tell them what a rotten father I am. Then they'll see whose fault it is. Mine!"

He put his face in his hands, and Sam got up and went over to him. But Miles wasn't crying, he was just hiding his face. Sam went to the table lamps and turned them off, hinting for Miles to retire. When he turned around. Miles was looking at the patterns in the carpet.

"Why not?" he said softly. "Why couldn't I do that, Sam?"

"Do what?"

"Defend Tod. In court."

"Look, Miles, you're no criminal lawyer. Liabilities, house closings, civil suits, stuff like that, okay. But not this." Sam rubbed at the heartburn in his chest. "Are you serious?"

"Why not?" Miles eyes glittered. "I'm a member of the bar; there's no law against defending a member of your family. Who could do it better? Sure, I'll get a criminal man, somebody to prepare the case, but you know what a jury is, Sam, you've seen enough of them. It's just twelve people, twelve people you've got to convince. People you have to make feel for you. Who could do that better than a father?"

"Do you mean a father? Or an actor?"

"Is that so bad?" Miles said vehemently. "God knows I played a dozen lawyers in pictures. That's what gave me the idea of studying for my degree, after I left Hollywood. I can do it, Sam, I know I can!"

"Look, what do you think this is, a double-feature? This is for real. Miles!"

Miles stood up. "I'll call Charles Macklemore tomorrow. I'll ask him to recommend a good criminal man. Then we'll see."

He limped toward the doorway, leaving his discarded shoes under the sofa. It was late, and he was tired, but he went up the stairs grandly, with dignity, like a star.

Macklemore didn't sound pleased when Miles roused him from sleep at eight the next morning, but he was quickly responsive when he learned the reason. They talked for half an hour. At the end of the conversation. Miles

wrote the name of an attorney on the phone pad: EDWIN C. RUTHERFORD, 74 Wall. Macklemore was hardly more enthusiastic about Miles' plan than Sam had been the night before, but he didn't prolong the argument. Obviously, he was leaving the job of discussion up to Rutherford.

Rutherford was a loose-limbed, shambling man who seemed to straddle his desk like a horse. He shifted, mumbled, scratched his face and chest as Miles talked. He slapped at flies, ingested coffee noisily from a cardboard container, and his thick, clumsy fingers broke two pencil points as he took notes. But at the conclusion of Miles' summary, Rutherford surprised him with a sharp, concise analysis of Tod's legal situation and possible pleas, and most unexpected, a sympathetic view of Miles' idea of the defense team.

"I don't see why not," he said gruffly. "You're a qualified attorney, even if you haven't handled cases of this nature. Of course, your personal interest in the case might he a hindrance. You know the old adage, 'He who keeps his own counsel has a fool for a lawyer.'"

Miles smiled back. "I've got a better quotation for you, Mr. Rutherford. 'Men seldom understand any laws but those they *feel.'* Lord Halifax."

Rutherford swatted an imaginary fly on his blotter.

"And that's what you think you can do, Mr. Crawford? Make them *feel?* Arouse their emotions?"

"I'm the boy's father."

"But it's not just that, is it? I mean, Charlie Macklemore once told me that you used to be some kind of actor. In the movies."

"That was a long time ago, Mr. Rutherford, way back in the forties. I made my last picture in 1953. I was admitted to the Bar, and that's been my business ever since."

Rutherford was looking at him oddly.

"All right!" Miles said. "Maybe that's what I do mean. I was an actor. I could make people feel things, that was my job."

"I see."

"I don't want to run your case for you," Miles said. "I just want to play my part." It might have been an unfortunate phrase; Rutherford scowled and scratched himself with evident irritability, but Miles didn't bother to correct it.

“We’ll see about it,” the lawyer said, “We’ll see how it goes. To me, the big question is the boy. What’s his name?”

“Tod.”

“Tod,” Rutherford said. “I mean, he’s got something to say about this, too. How do you know he wants you to do this? It’s a murder charge. He’s old enough to face the chair. The least you can do is ask him if he wishes this.”

Miles twitched with a sudden doubt.

“Yes,” he said. “You’re right, of course. I have to ask him.”

He saw Tod the next morning. After his indictment by the grand jury, the boy had been transferred to the county prison on Fleet Avenue and had already been smoothly incorporated into the routine. When he came out into the visitor’s room, the gray shirt and trousers fitted him too well, and his manner was docile.

“How are you?” Miles said. “How are they treating you?”

Tod shrugged. He seemed bored with the visit already.

“It’s going to be all right,” Miles said. “I’ve been talking it over with Rutherford, the lawyer you saw yesterday afternoon. I’m afraid we can’t get you out on bail, but—”

“When’s this arraignment he told me about?”

“Next week some time. That’s when we’ll enter our plea for manslaughter. You understand the difference, don’t you?”

Tod looked at his hands.

“You see, it’s all a matter of premeditation,” Miles said, lowering his voice. “That’s the big difference between murder and manslaughter, premeditation and provocation. Do you know what I’m talking about? A mutual combat, as long as the fight wasn’t provoked for the purpose of killing, that’s what they call a provocative act. Didn’t Rutherford tell you?”

“He talked for two hours,” Tod said indifferently. “I couldn’t follow him very well.”

Miles leaned closer. “Listen to me. Tod, I want to ask you something. Something important.”

“What?”

“How would you feel if I acted as your defense counsel? Me, personally. Oh, not alone; Rutherford would do all the real work. I’ll just be the front man. How would you feel about that. Tod?”

The boy looked bewildered.

"I don't get it. You're no criminal lawyer."

"No, I'm not. I won't be so clever about it, maybe I'll make some stupid mistakes. Rutherford will help me out there, but I could still look pretty stupid. But I think I can make that jury listen to me. Tod. I think I can make them—understand." He paused, hurting at the blankness of his son's expression. "I won't do it unless you say it's all right. It's a serious business, I don't have to tell you that. You've got the right to say no."

"You'd do that for me?" Tod said softly.

Miles found his eyes. They were filling with tears.

"Gee, Pop," Tod said.

He put out his hands and clasped the hands of his father. He held on to them, firmly, and looked into Miles' face with wonder and a sort of discovery.

Something happened to Rutherford immediately after Tod's arraignment. The casual, shambling manner disappeared, the soft sleepy eyes became hard and brilliant. The cram course he gave Miles in criminal law turned out to be an ordeal, a combination of lecture, scolding, and castigation. Every day he told Miles that he was making a mistake, that he was playing games with his son's life, that he would make a fool of himself in court. He called Miles an ambulance chaser, and once he called him a movie lawyer, with great contempt. He even threatened to drop the case if Miles displayed any Hollywood theatrics in court. But through it all he managed to build a defense theory, and instructed Miles Crawford in the part of presenting it to a jury.

Rutherford produced references by the stack. He dug quotations from court language, and made Miles listen to paragraph after paragraph.

"'Design must precede the killing by some appreciable space of time. But the time need not be long. It must be sufficient for some reflection and consideration upon the matter, for choice to kill or not to kill, and for the formation of a definite purpose to kill.' That's from the *People vs. Majone,*" Rutherford said. "It all depends on what you call deliberation. That's our whole case. Cold blood vs. hot blood, that's what we have to prove."

"But can we? You heard what Tod said. They parked the car. They parked the car and got out and had the fight. They knew what they were doing, Ed!"

“Did they? We’ve got to show that they didn’t. It’s a fine line between murder and manslaughter, and we’ve got to draw it. We’ve got to show there wasn’t any cooling-off period, not a minute’s worth. And it won’t be easy. I know this fellow Hanley, the prosecuting attorney. He’s a tough cookie. He’s from the eye-for-an-eye school.”

“Maybe you’re right,” Miles said gloomily. “Maybe you ought to handle the whole thing.”

“You really mean that?”

Miles scowled.

“No! You said it yourself, it’s not just a bundle of facts. The important thing is what was in Tod’s heart. That’s what I can do. I can tell them!”

Rutherford sighed resignedly.

“Same time tomorrow,” he said.

When Miles returned home that evening, he found Jenny flustered with excitement and four reporters parked at his front door. He pushed past them into the house, and Jenny protested vigorously about the invasion. Sam was waiting for him, too, in the living room, and offered to go outside and get rid of them. Miles said no, that he wanted the Press on his side, that it would be good for Tod, and Sam frowned and settled into a corner of the sofa. The reporters were allowed in, accompanied by cries of “wipe your feet!” and “watch those ashes!” from Jenny. They fired questions at Miles, wanting to know his plans for Tod’s defense. When they started talking about the movies, Sam, on the sofa, squirmed and grunted, but Miles let them talk.

“What about it, Mr. Crawford?” one of the reporters said. “Didn’t you use to play criminal lawyers in pictures?”

“Yes, that’s right, but that has nothing to do with this.”

“How long you been out of pictures, Mr. Crawford, isn’t it about thirty years?”

“Yes, it’s about that.”

“Miles!” Sam Brody stood up and shook his head in warning. “Get rid of them. Miles! Now!”

“How about it, Mr. Crawford? You think your experience in the movies will help your son?”

“No, of course not.”

“You ever lose a case in the movies?”

"That's a stupid question—"

"You thinking of getting back into pictures, Mr. Crawford?"

"Don't be ridiculous!" He glared at the young reporter who asked this question. "I'm a lawyer, young man, I've been a lawyer for most of my life." The newsman smiled back amiably.

"Isn't this a sort of comeback, Mr. Crawford? I mean, if you give a good performance in court, isn't it possible that some producer—"

The slap came more suddenly than anyone was prepared for. The sound of it hung in the quickly silenced room even as the imprint of Miles' fingers faded from the cheek of the reporter. It was Sam who moved first, moved in and took over, herding the reporters back to the front hallway, smoothing over their indignation and getting them out without answering questions or words of anger.

When he came back to the living room. Miles was in the same place, looking at the hand that struck the blow.

"Have a drink," Sam said. "And next time, don't talk so much. Try the case in court, not in the papers."

Miles looked at him.

"Sam," he said, "What do you think?"

"I think you're pretty tired."

"I swear that's not my reason, Sam. About the movies, about getting back. I put those ideas away long ago. You know that, don't you?"

"As long as you know it," Sam Brody said.

Then he went to get the drink.

Miles had been in courtrooms before. He had faced jury boxes and judges and argued cases for his clients. But the stakes had never been as high or as meaningful to him before, and when the court was called into session, he was almost prompted to tell Rutherford that he had changed his mind, that he wasn't competent to play this role, that he belonged among the spectators and not within the bar.

But he said nothing. The process of law began, the seating of the jury, the entrance of the judge, solemn in his black robes. Rutherford walked up to the raised desk and handed over a copy of the brief he had prepared, and the prosecuting attorney, Hanley, a surprisingly gentle-appearing man in his fifties, with fair hair and a scholarly look enhanced by rimless glasses, stood up to make his opening statement. He talked softly, without passion,

and his simple, declarative sentences concerning the events of the night in question seemed to interest the jury without moving them. Miles felt more hopeful as he listened; the man was underplaying too much, it was a drab performance. He whispered his opinion to Rutherford, and the attorney shook his head in disagreement. Miles listened more intently then, and knew that Hanley was understating the facts deliberately, keeping the dramatic details in reserve for the statements of witnesses, making a promise of revelations and conclusive evidence to come. By the time he sat down, the jury was still unmoved, but they were eager to be convinced.

Miles and Rutherford had agreed to withhold their statement to the jury for the conclusion of the People's case. It was time for the first testimony.

Hanley was bold. He called the most important witness of all to the stand, the defendant. Tod Crawford.

Tod seemed in a daze. He looked surprised to find himself in the witness chair; he hadn't expected this first call. When Hanley asked him to describe the events of that night, he stammered them out without order or logic, and had to be led back to sequence by the prosecutor. He told them about the drinking bout; he admitted that it was a frequent event. He named the other two youths who were with him, and related the cause of the argument.

"We were going to see these girls," he said. "They lived on the other side of town. They were giving a party. Juley had a bottle in the car, and we were all drinking. I didn't want him to, because he was driving, and it's not my car, it's my father's. He got sore about that, and that brought up some other things. About one of the girls we knew. That was when he stopped the car and wanted to fight. The other guy, Rudy, pulled us apart, but we were pretty hot. Then somebody suggested we settle it on the road."

"Who?" Hanley said.

"I don't know, I don't remember. But we got out, and I didn't know Juley meant to make a knife contest out of it, not until he showed it. So I took out my knife."

"You always carried a knife?"

"Most of the time."

"Go on."

"That's all there was. We began to fight. Juley cut me first, and then I got him. I didn't know he was dead. I just got back into the car and drove home. I was pretty upset. I just left both of them there."

“You left the knife in his body?”

“Yes,” Tod said. “That’s how it was.”

At Rutherford’s instruction. Miles didn’t ask to cross-examine; it was their intention to call Tod as a defense witness later on. Miles got his first chance to perform when the prosecution called Rudy Trask to the stand. Hanley had Trask identify himself as the third youth in the car that night, and then extracted his version of the events. It matched Tod in all respects, but Hanley added one more vital question.

“Mr. Trask, had there been any trouble between Tod Crawford and Jules Herman prior to the night of the slaying?”

“Yes, sir,” Trask mumbled.

“What sort of trouble? Had they fought before?”

“Not with knives. They had fist fights.”

“Then there was a definite animosity between them?”

“On and off.”

“What was the cause of their differences?”

“A lot of things. Sometimes girls. Sometimes, it was Tod’s old man.”

Against a background of murmuring spectators. Miles squirmed at the defense table, and coughed.

“Juley like to rib Tod a lot. He used to ask him why he didn’t go out to Hollywood and be a movie star, like his father used to be. That always made Tod sore. You never could kid around with Tod much, he didn’t like it.”

“How serious were these fist fights?”

“Tod sprained Juley’s wrist once.”

“Was the incident reported to the police?”

“No,” Trask said blankly.

“That’s all,” Hanley said.

It was Miles’ turn. He stood up, with more inner quivering than he had ever felt before a camera. He stepped to the witness stand, aware of the intensity of the eyes about him.

“Mr. Trask, how long would you say that my—that Tod Crawford knew Jules Herman?”

“Maybe eight, ten months.”

“How often did they see each other?”

“Maybe two, three times a week.”

“So then they were really friends, wouldn’t you say? Not enemies?”

Hanley stood up and suggested mildly that Miles was asking for a conclusion. The judge agreed.

“This fist fight,” Miles said. “The one in which the wrist was sprained. Had they planned to have it, like they ‘decided’ to have the knife fight? You should know.”

“No. It was just one of those things that happen.”

“All of a sudden, out of a clear blue sky?”

“Yeah, I guess you’d say that. Juley jumped Tod, and—”

“You say Juley jumped him? Then Juley instigated the fight?”

“Well, Tod called Juley a—”

“Never mind what he called him! Jules Herman made the first aggressive move?”

“That’s right.”

“Did the same thing happen on the night of September 14? You witnessed the fight, Mr. Trask. Didn’t Jules Herman instigate that, too? Didn’t he strike the first blow?”

“That’s hard to say.”

“Didn’t Jules Herman slash Tod’s arm? Wasn’t that the first wound inflicted? Were you watching the fight, Mr. Trask, or weren’t you interested?”

“Sure I was watching! Tod was cut first, all right, but that doesn’t mean —”

“That’s all, Mr. Trask!”

Miles wheeled away from the stand and went quickly back to the defense table. His heart was pounding, and he wasn’t seeing straight, but his vision was good enough to take in the expression on Rutherford’s face. The smile was minimal, but it was there, and Miles was cognizant he had done well.

The trouble came on the second day. Hanley came into the courtroom with most of his scholarly reserve gone. His first witness of the day was a red-mouthed, flamboyantly pretty girl named Barbara Riordan; she had an insolent manner and too much makeup for her age, barely seventeen. She was the “girl” of the quarrels between Jules and Tod, and Miles sickened at the sight of the would-be trollop his son had fought over. Rutherford had warned Miles about women witnesses, either out of misogyny or

experience; he had claimed that they were born partisans, given to violent, uncompromising loyalty to the side they elected to serve. His warning proved true in the case of Barbara Riordan.

"You saw Jules Herman and Tod Crawford argue?" Hanley asked. "You even saw them fight?"

"I sure did," she said, tossing her hair. "They fought all the time, over anything. Sometimes me," she smiled.

"Yet they were together constantly, weren't they? Didn't you find that strange?"

"Sometimes people are friends because they hate each other." She offered it as an aphorism, and looked pleased.

"You think they hated each other?"

"I know they did."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Not just on account of the quarrels. It was what Tod used to say to me. He once told me he'd kill Juley some day. How do you like that?" She looked defiantly at Tod, and listened with gratification to the courtroom reaction.

"You mean he actually threatened Jules Herman's life?"

"More than once, and that's the truth. He told me that if Juley didn't stay away from me, he'd cut his throat."

Rutherford gave Miles swift instruction about the cross-examination: to deprecate character, to suggest a bias against Tod that would explain her hostile testimony. But when he tried to make the girl admit to a grudge, she smiled sweetly and said:

"Of course I like Tod, I always liked him a lot. I wouldn't want to see him in any trouble. But I couldn't lie about what he told me, could I?" She looked at Miles boldly, aware of the point she had scored.

There were three other prosecution witnesses, all testifying to the wild nature and irresponsibility of Tod Crawford's behavior, to the obvious enmity between him and the dead boy. There were police testimony about the scene of the conflict, the knife that Tod had left behind in Jules Herman's body, his quick flight home, his arrest, his ready admission of guilt, and, perhaps worst of all, his seeming lack of remorse.

The prosecution took two more days to present its case, and the wall of evidence grew higher, wider, and more impenetrable with every hour. The

defense cross-examinations proved dangerous; Rutherford had predicted they would be. Harmful witnesses could be doubly harmful when their statements were repeated and sometimes reinforced by defense questions. Yet there were no alternatives; the defense had no witnesses of its own; they had to use the material on hand.

They pinned their hopes on Tod.

He took the stand at his father's bidding, and harshly, leaning over backwards to show his objectivity. Miles questioned him about the killing of Jules Herman.

"Did you mean to kill Jules Herman when you went out on that road?"

"No, I didn't."

"Did you even mean to injure him? Or were you must trying to defend yourself?"

Tod hesitated. "I don't know what I thought. I was drunk, I was all muddled up."

Miles took a deep breath.

"Did you hate Jules Herman?"

"No."

"But you were always fighting, weren't you? Why was that?"

"I don't know. We just seemed to get on each other's nerves. But we made up again, every time." He paused. "Things were better before we met her."

"Do you mean Barbara Riordan?"

"Yes."

"Were you in love with this girl?"

"I don't know. A little, maybe."

"Did you ever tell her you wanted to kill Jules?"

"I don't remember saying anything like that."

"Then why do you think she said you did?"

Tod shrugged. "She liked Juley. She hates me for what happened. She wants to get even."

There was a prosecution objection to the answer, and it was sustained.

Miles was sweating heavily; he had lost his sensitivity to cold in the past month; the sweat slid from his forehead to his eyes, and he kept mopping at his face.

"Did you ever have any thoughts of killing your friend?"

Tod looked at the floor.

"No," he said. "I told you that."

"Was killing him in your mind the night of the slaying?"

Tod didn't answer. The pause didn't help; Miles' jaw tightened and he leaned forward.

"Please answer the question!"

"I don't know," Tod said. "I just don't know what I was thinking about when it happened."

"But were you thinking about murder?"

Tod's shoulders slumped.

"I wasn't thinking about anything. I just did what I had to do. That's all there was to it."

The silence was heavy, even oppressive, in the courtroom. The very air seemed to have changed. A cough in the rear of the room sounded like an explosion.

"That's all," Miles whispered to his son.

He went back to the table, and Rutherford took over. The attorney got to his feet and announced that the case for the defense was concluded. Then he asked the judge for a directed verdict of manslaughter. The judge replied negatively, and told Miles and the attorney to prepare to give their concluding remarks to the jury that afternoon.

"It'll be all right," Miles told Rutherford as they left the courtroom. "You'll see, Ed. I'll make them feel for Tod, you see if I don't!"

At two that afternoon, Miles rose to address the jury. They had been only faces before, alternately hostile and sympathetic, but now they were unified as audience. He stood before them, as if humbled into silence by the weight of the burden he bore. It was a full ten seconds before he began, in a quiet monotone.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, a boy is dead, and men who are the caretakers of human justice are crying out for revenge. You see them here before you, demanding life for life, all in the name of that blindfolded statue who stands outside this courthouse. When you leave this room, it will be your responsibility to say yes or no to their demands for a total penalty. But before you decide, I ask you to think about one more question.

"Is there really a perfect justice? Complete, impartial, blind to prejudice or special interest? If there is, I say thank God! Thank God that we

imperfect human beings have been given such a great gift, such generous forgiveness of our own sins, that we can still mete out perfect justice to other sinners.

"If you have never sinned, not even outside the law's power to punish, then what I have to say is not for you. If you are blameless, never made an error, never wronged someone, never caused a hurt or an injury to another fellow human, you have the right to choose the way and manner of this boy's punishment."

His voice rose, gained in volume.

"If you're ready to close the account books on Tod Crawford—to say that with one moment's action, one movement of his hand, one flicker of his eye, one bewildered second of his existence, he forfeited his right to live, to breathe, to regret, to change, to make reparation for sins past and present—this is your privilege.

"But be sure about what you do!"

"Have you ever spoken a hurtful word in anger to your wife, your husband, your child, and then felt sorry? No problem, was it? A kiss, a gentle phrase, and all was well again. Have you ever flung a stone, smashed a dish, shouted a curse? Slapped a cheek? Struck a child? Spoken a lie? Broken a promise? What was your punishment? Remorse, self-torture, recrimination? Yet the book was never closed on your mistakes, the key was never turned on the lock, with never again a chance to say, 'I regret, I am sorry, I will live to be a better person.'

"But this boy did more than break a dish or a promise. He took a life. In a single moment, blind with the meaningless rage of living in a world he didn't understand, he took a life. Premeditated? No more than the angry word, the broken dish, the stone flung or the cheek slapped. Premeditated? Deliberated? To kill in the sight of witnesses, in the sight of God, under the harsh eyes of a vengeful law?"

He had been shouting; he fought for control; he dropped his voice. He leaned on the edge of the jury box.

"You may close Tod Crawford's account book. The law gives you that right. He is twenty-three years old. Perhaps he is old enough to face a justice diviner than ours.

"But remember this. Before that divine court. Tod Crawford must make this statement: 'My last act on earth was to kill a man who was my friend. I

was given no time to do anything more with my life.'"

Miles loosened his fingers from the jury box, and turned slowly. He went back to the defense table, terribly aware of the hushed silence of the courtroom, unable to appraise its meaning.

Then they were applauding. The sound broke like a sudden storm among the spectators, and Miles tried to hide the exultation of the moment, tried to take his seat beside Rutherford without a change of expression. The judge, hesitating for a moment, picked up the gavel and rapped the courtroom into order. The applause died quickly, but its echoes clung.

Hanley was on his feet. He was calm no longer; he had been moved by the peroration, but only to a tightly-controlled anger.

"Your honor—"

"Yes, Mr. Hanley?"

"Your Honor, in view of the fine response of the, er, spectators to Mr. Crawford's speech, I would like to reserve the closing argument of the prosecution until tomorrow morning."

"Very well, Mr. Hanley. Court is adjourned until ten A.M. tomorrow."

Miles didn't hear the final words of the day; he was watching Rutherford, and Rutherford was watching the jury. Then, as they left the courtroom, the attorney squeezed Miles arm and whispered something Miles couldn't hear. He repeated it in the corridor outside.

"I didn't think it was possible," he said. "I wouldn't have believed it. But I think you did all right in there, Mr. Crawford!"

Hanley, his mouth thin, his briefcase clutched tightly under his arm, passed them; then he stopped and came back, the thin lips turning upwards in a congratulatory smile.

"Good speech," he said to Miles. "You're a talented man, Mr. Crawford, I always thought so."

"Thank you," Miles said.

"Yes, I've always been a fan," Hanley said, his eyes glinting oddly. "You'll remember that, won't you? Even after tomorrow?"

Then he chuckled dryly, and strode away. Rutherford looked after him with worried eyes.

"What is it? What's bothering you?" Miles said.

“I don’t know. But I do know Hanley. And in my opinion, that was a threat.”

There was something different about the prosecution table the next day; when Miles took his seat beside Rutherford, he regarded the strange clutter of objects curiously, and then, with a shock, recognized their function.

Hanley was on his feet, addressing the court.

“Your Honor, before making my final remarks to the jury, I have a rather unusual request. I make it in the sincere belief that this case, as any other, must be judged upon the facts, and not on the emotional displays of the participants.”

The judge twisted his mouth wryly. “I’m sure we all believe that, counselor. Please go on with your request.”

Hanley took an audible breath.

“Your Honor, I would like permission to show a portion of motion picture film to the court.”

Rutherford glanced at Miles apprehensively; Miles was staring at the portable screen and projector on the table.

“Is this in the nature of new evidence, Mr. Hanley?”

“No, Your Honor. This is the final reel of a motion picture entitled *The Guilty One,* produced in 1941 by Allied American Studios. I was fortunate in locating the film at a warehouse in Long Island City. It was, I’m afraid, what is commonly known as a “B” picture. It had a very short run, as a second feature. However, I believe this film is relevant, if not to the case of Tod Crawford, then to the conduct of his defense.” Hanley stepped forward and dropped his voice to a conversational level. “Frankly, Your Honor, the contents of this film might even cast some doubt about the quality of this trial, and I think it is in the best interests of all that it be shown. May I come forward?”

The judge nodded.

Hanley went to the bench, and spoke briefly to the man in the black robes. He seemed startled by what he heard; he ended by consenting to the exhibit.

Rutherford watched Miles. He had sunk into his chair, his eyes glassy, his expression detached. The attorney whispered questions at him, but Miles didn’t reply.

A clerk from the prosecuting attorney's office, with the assistance of the bailiff, set up the screen in front of the judge's desk; the projector was placed on a small table in mid-aisle. The spectators murmured excitedly; the white rectangle of the screen became a question mark. Only Miles remained disinterested, eyes fixed into space.

"We're ready now," the clerk said. The bailiff dimmed the courtroom lights.

And on the screen, there appeared another courtroom.

A jury of actors sat in the box. A gray-haired professional presided gravely as the judge. And, stepping forth to address the make-believe jury, was the youthful, dark-haired, slim figure of Miles Crawford. Age: thirty. Profession: Star.

There was a momentary difficulty with the sound; then it emanated loudly from the projector's speaker, filling the real and the cinematic courtroom with the actor's rich, emotion-laden voice.

"A boy is dead!" the movie lawyer said. "A boy is dead, and the men who are the caretakers of human justice are crying out for revenge. You see them here before you, demanding life for life, all in the name of that blindfolded statue who stands outside this courthouse."

Rutherford gripped Miles' arm. On the screen, the youthful defendant, smoothly handsome even in the wide-shouldered, wide-lapeled fashion of the day, put his hand over his troubled eyes.

"Justice?" the actor said to the camera. "Complete? Impartial?"

The murmur was growing in the courtroom, the realization of what was being seen and heard, the terrible meaning.

"But if you have never sinned, not even outside the law's power to punish, then what I have to say is not for you. If you're blameless, never made an error, never wronged someone, never caused a hurt of an injury. . ."

"Make them stop," Miles said to the attorney. "For God's sake, Ed, make them stop it!"

"Your Honor!" Rutherford shouted. "Your Honor, please—"

". . .one flicker of his eye, one bewildered second of his existence," Miles Crawford said on the screen, "he forfeited his right to live, to breathe, to regret, to change, to make reparation for sins past and present—"

"*Stop it!*" Miles screamed.

Hanley said something to the clerk; there was a hurried movement to the light switches in the back of the courtroom, and a hand flicked the device that made the light die on the screen, and the picture fade into blank, unaccusing whiteness.

Hanley came back to the bar, his face solemn.

"Your Honor, I see no reason for continuing the film at this point, and am happy to accede to the request of the defense." He turned to Miles. He didn't look triumphant, but neither was he ashamed. "I have always been an ardent fan of Mr. Crawford's. I couldn't help but recall something familiar about his fine address to the jury. Fortunately, I was able to remember where I had heard it before. I have not shown it to embarrass Mr. Crawford. I have shown it because of what I said earlier, in the interests of having the facts determine the outcome of this trial, and not the emotional power of a —very fine performer."

He went back to his seat.

Miles was still standing, looking helplessly at the faces turned to him, asking unspoken questions too difficult for answers.

"Your Honor," he said hoarsely. "Your Honor, it's true. The speech wasn't mine. It was written for me, many years ago. I used it because it made sense to me then, as it does now. I used it because it was the only thing I thought of saying."

The response was silence. He saw Tod's face, once again blank, uncaring, resigned. In the last few moments, he had lost his role as his son's defender; he was the Actor, the Star that Tod despised.

"I've deceived you," Miles said. "I've made you feel foolish, and made myself even more of a fool. I admit that, I can't avoid the blame. But don't make Tod suffer for it, not my son. Don't punish him when I'm the one who should be punished."

He turned to the jurybox, and met the cold, impassive faces he feared to see. There was nothing more to say. He took a step in the direction of his chair.

Then he stopped.

"Wait a minute. Wait." He pointed at the man who was taking the projector from the table in the center of the aisle. "Your Honor, if I could say something—"

"Go ahead, Mr. Crawford, no one's stopping you."

He came closer to the bench. “Your Honor, in the name of fairness—”

The judge stiffened.

“Since you were good enough to permit the prosecution to show this film, will you permit it to be shown to its conclusion? Will you allow that?”

“I hardly see the point, Mr. Crawford.”

“There’s one more scene. Your Honor, after the trial episode. One final scene. May it be shown?”

Hanley grunted and went to assist in the disassembly of the screen. “Your Honor, I hadn’t intended to turn this courtroom into a movie theatre. I merely wanted to show—”

“Please!” Miles said. “It’s only fair! Show the film to its conclusion. Let them see what happens. To him, to the boy in the case. I beg you!”

The judge rubbed his lips, faced with a curious problem of equal treatment. Then he sighed, and said:

“Very well. Since I acceded to the first request, perhaps it is only right that I accede to yours. Mr. Hanley, you will instruct your assistant to show the reel to its completion.”

“But Your Honor—”

“Please comply, Mr. Hanley.”

The prosecutor shrugged, and then signaled to his clerk with an airy gesture. The projector was readied once more, and Miles went over and fixed the reel into place himself, keeping his finger on the knob that produced sound from the film track. The lights were dimmed, and he threw the switch that cast the pictures on the screen.

It was the end of the trial scene. The jury was filing into the box, and the foreman was rising to present its verdict to the court.

“We, the jury, find the defendant guilty as charged.”

The scene faded.

The setting was a death cell.

On the narrow bunk, the boy sat with head in hands, awaiting the hour of his last judgment.

The cell door opened, and the prison chaplain entered. His face was solemn; he came to offer consolation, not hope. He dropped a hand on the boy’s shoulder, and the boy wept. The chaplain opened the Bible in his hand, and read the words that would introduce the condemned man to eternity.

The warden entered, flanked by two prison guards. There was no news of reprieve. The time of the execution had been fixed at eleven o'clock. It was ten minutes to the hour.

The boy stood up. He put his arms out in supplication. He sobbed, and swore repentance, and pleaded in the name of his dead mother for mercy. The warden's face was moved, but he was powerless to act. Gently, he pushed the arms aside, and spoke to the guards.

It was time to prepare him. The boy's shoes were removed and carpet slippers were placed on his feet. His trousers were slit. He was taken by the arms, his body sagging between the guards.

Then the march began. Slowly, to the sepulchral music of the chaplain's mumbled prayers, to the sound of the boy's sobbing voice, begging for the right to live another day, another hour, another moment.

They reached the small door at the corridor's end, and disappeared inside. When the door clanged shut, the scene faded, and it was

THE END.

The lights went up, and in the sudden vacuum of sound and motion, Ed Rutherford sought out the faces of the jury, to witness, if possible, the result of a verdict not yet cast.

Their decision was made after less than an hour's deliberation. It sent Tod Crawford to prison for a term of not more than twenty years on the charge of manslaughter. It was greeted with tears by Miles Crawford, but he brushed them aside as he took his son into his arms for a loving embrace.

Behind the Locked Door

Aired: March 27, 1964

Teleplay by Henry Slesar and Joel Murcott

Directed by Robert Douglas

Starring: James MacArthur and Gloria Swanson

The house was a Sphinx, squatting on the hillside. It had the dark, sullen look of all empty houses, but its size also made it seem tragic. It was four stories high, the topmost floor overhanging the entrance and supported on spidery white columns. It was a house built in an era of opulence, and then deserted by its owners for smaller, racier houses in more fashionable sections of the countryside.

When the headlights of the convertible shone on its front gate and driveway, Bonnie Daniels clapped her hands in excitement and was out of the car even before Davey applied the brake. He laughed and ran after her, leaving the lights on and the motor running, and caught her slim, fragile figure at the door. Spotlighted, they embraced and kissed. Then, as Bonnie searched her purse for the key, the boy went back to the car and turned the switches that made it as dark and silent as the house itself. By the time he returned to the front door, Bonnie had it open.

"Hey," he said complainingly. "Wait for me."

She was hunting light sources, and finding them. The front room blazed into view, but the gloom of the old house was only partly dispelled. There were too many bulbs not burning, fixtures stripped of their glare-softening shields, chandeliers dangling uselessly from disconnected wires. Her young, small-boned face lost some of its excited glow as she looked at the interior, at the scurfy wallpaper, the cracked ceilings, the white-shrouded furniture. Davey, sensing the injury to her cherished memory, came up behind her and put his hand very gently on her shoulder.

"Looks different, huh?" he said softly. "How long's it been since you were here?"

"I guess it's almost eight years. I was nine when father died, and that's when we moved out." She dropped into the corner of a sheet-covered sofa. "We've rented the place every summer. That's why the lights are still on." She looked up sharply. "Davey, maybe we shouldn't have come here."

He grinned. It was an appealing, crooked grin placing lean dimples on the smooth plane of his cheeks. He was twenty-two, and the best-looking boy that had ever come into Bonnie Daniels' life, and now he was even more than that.

"Davey," she whispered.

He went to the sofa and held her in his arms.

Soon her good spirits were restored. She took him by the hand and they went exploring through the old house. From room to room and floor to floor, racing down corridors, giggling at ancestral portraits, playing hide-and-seek in the labyrinth of upstairs bedrooms, they made the old house shake with their exuberance and ring with their laughter. It was on the fourth and topmost floor that Davey tried the door that wouldn't yield, and he called out:

"Hey, Bonnie, this one's stuck."

She came alongside him and dropped her voice. "No, it isn't. It's locked. It's always been locked."

He pushed against the knob. The oak door was so sturdy that it barely rattled. "What's behind it?" he said.

"I don't know. It's been locked ever since I can remember. Daddy once told me never to go near this room, and once I remember my mother talking about it, sort of nervously."

"Sounds mysterious," he chuckled. "What do you say we break it in?"

"Oh, Davey, no! We can't do that."

"Well, gee, aren't you curious? Maybe it's full of hanging women, like in Bluebeard's castle. Or maybe that's where the family jewels are hidden —"

She shivered. "Let's leave it alone, Davey. I was always scared of that door." When he threw his shoulder against it, only tentatively, she cried out: "Davey, don't!"

"Well, what's it locked for? There must be something pretty valuable in there." He licked his lips; there was more than playful excitement in his eyes. "Look, for all you know, there might be money in there. I mean, you father left the house to you, didn't he? If there's something valuable inside, it belongs to you!"

"Davey, you promised not to talk about the money."

"I'm not talking about your mother's money—"

“But the house isn’t really mine. Not yet. Not until I’m twenty-one, and that’s four years from now.”

“Don’t be technical.”

“Davey!”

He grinned, but less effectively in the dim corridor. Then he laughed, and put his arm around her thin shoulders. “Okay, if that’s how you feel about it. We’ve got plenty of time, anyway.” He tried to kiss her, but she pulled away.

“Let’s go downstairs,” she said. “Please, Davey.”

They went to the first floor. Davey, with dramatic gestures, whipped off the dusty sheets from the furniture in the front room. Then he went to the basement on some unexplained errand and returned with an armful of kindling. A city boy, he was inexpert at building the fire in the oversized fireplace, but he finally got it going. They pushed a sofa around to face it, and curled into each other’s arms. With the lights out, they watched the dreamy dance of the flames until Bonnie nodded drowsily against Davey’s chest.

“Kitten,” he whispered. “Time to go to bed.”

She was asleep. He was about to shake her awake, when the sound of tires on gravel did it for him. The twin beam of a car’s headlights flashed through the front windows and cast strong shadows across the room.

“What the hell,” Davey growled. “We’ve got company.”

The car had stopped in the driveway, and they heard the slamming of its door. Bonnie jumped up hastily, straightening her rumpled clothes and running toward the window.

“It’s Mother!” Bonnie gasped.

The front door had been left unlatched, and now it was thrown open rudely by the gloved hand of the intruder. She towered in the doorway like some matriarchal figure of vengeance, and her swift-moving eyes surveyed the tableau with rapid understanding. It was only her anger that gave her stature; she was a short, matronly woman who looked as if she had dressed hurriedly, but without forgetting the obligatory touches of jewelry at her wrist and throat, or the furpiece about her neck. In three strides she reached her daughter, and seized her by the arm.

“Mother, please!” Bonnie stammered. “It’s all right—”

“All right, is it?” The woman was a storm. She turned the force of it on Davey, standing helplessly in front of the dying flames. “I suppose you’re David Snowden. I’ve heard about you, Mr. Snowden. Thank God I had the sense to think of this place when Bonnie didn’t show up at home and—”

“You have it all wrong! Davey, tell her!”

He gestured feebly. “Mrs. Daniels, I—”

“Never mind,” the woman said. “I understand everything. I was afraid something like this might happen as soon as Bonnie started mentioning you in her letters from school.” She pushed the girl ahead of her. “Get your things, Bonnie. We’re going home.”

“Mrs. Daniels!”

She glared at him.

“We’re married, Mrs. Daniels.”

Her grip lightened on Bonnie’s arm, but she didn’t release her. She looked blankly at the lean, suddenly more confident boy in front of the fireplace, and then at her daughter’s pinched, narrow-lipped face.

“It’s true,” Bonnie whispered. “We were married in Elkton this afternoon.”

“That can’t be. You’re underage.”

“Not in Elkton, Mother. Seventeen is old enough. Davey and I are married, so you can’t treat us like this.” She seemed shocked at her own defiance. “Mother, please try and understand.”

“Oh, I understand, all right.” She dropped the girl’s arm and advanced toward the boy. “I went through a dozen Daveys when I was your age,” she said coldly. “All the handsome boys who thought I was the catch of the season, even if I had braces on my teeth and a bad complexion.” She sat down weakly on the arm of a chair, and touched her cheek with a gloved hand. “Oh, Bonnie,” she said. “My poor Bonnie.”

Davey cleared his throat. “It’s not like that,” he said. “I love Bonnie, Mrs. Daniels.”

She passed a hand over her eyes. Then she said: “I suppose you have no money.”

“Mother!”

“No,” Davey said. “My family were immigrants. My father was a freight dispatcher until he died. My mother’s alive, but I don’t even know

where." He straightened, expressing both dignity and courage. "I don't have any kind of family background, Mrs. Daniels. But I love Bonnie."

"Why?"

The girl turned her head away.

"You heard me, Mr. Snowden. *Why?*"

Davey hesitated. "I don't know what you mean. You can't explain something like that."

"She's a plain girl!" the woman said bluntly. "Are you blind? She's plain! Why does a handsome boy like you want to marry a plain girl like my daughter? Do you think I'm stupid?"

Bonnie covered her plain face, and Davey swallowed hard.

"I love her," he said. "That's all there is to it. We're married and there's nothing you can do about it."

The woman stood up. "You're handsome, Mr. Snowden, but not very bright. There's everything in the world I can do about it. I intend to have this marriage annulled immediately."

"We won't let you do that, Mrs. Daniels."

She snorted. "There's nothing you can do to stop me, Mr. Snowden, not until my daughter reaches her majority. And by that time—well, we'll see what happens by that time." She touched Bonnie's shoulder. "I'm going home now, Bonnie, and I want you to come with me."

"I won't!"

"Don't make it any worse than it is now!"

"I won't," the girl sobbed. "Davey, tell her I can't go—"

"You see how it is, Mrs. Daniels."

"Yes, I see how it is." She sighed, and started for the door. "But you'll regret this, Bonnie, mark my words."

"Mother, I can't live without Davey! If you make us separate. I'll never forgive you!"

"You will, Bonnie."

"I'll kill myself! Do you hear me. Mother? I'll kill myself if you do this!"

Mrs. Daniels looked pained, but not moved. "Don't talk nonsense. A heart doesn't break. It withers. That's what I don't want you to find out."

"I mean it!" Bonnie shrieked at her. "I'll kill myself! I will!"

The woman looked at her pityingly, and then opened the front door. In the fireplace, the last clutch of flames flared up and died on the blackened log.

They left the old house at ten the next morning and drove into the city. Davey was shamefaced when he admitted her into his two-room, downtown apartment, aware of the sharp contrast between it and the decayed magnificence of the Daniels house. There was decay in evidence here, too, but of a different kind. Bonnie looked about the small, dingy rooms with a bravely indifferent smile, but her gay suggestions about making the apartment more liveable sounded unconvincing. It was only at night that they forgot where they were, and felt secure and happy again.

"Davey," Bonnie murmured. "What's going to happen to us? Can she really do what she said?"

"I don't know. We'll have to talk to a lawyer."

"But what if she can? I couldn't stand that, Davey!"

"Don't worry. You've got one thing going for you, kitten, and that makes all the difference in the world. Your mother loves you. She wouldn't hurt you for anything."

After a moment's silence, Bonnie said: "Davey, tell me the truth. Do you think I'm plain?"

"I think you're beautiful," he said.

She was asleep before he was, and he lit a cigarette and smoked it thoughtfully, his eyes on the ceiling.

The next day, Davey paid a call on the law firm of Hellinger and Dowes, where the father of an old fraternity friend was employed. He was gone all morning, and when he returned, he found Bonnie in an anxious state.

His report was glum.

"It doesn't look good," he said. "The lawyer thinks your mother can run us through a wringer. By the time she's through with us, I'll probably be arrested for kidnapping you over the state lines. It looks pretty hopeless, kitten."

"It can't be, Davey! Maybe if you talked to her—"

"She won't give me the chance. She's made up her mind that all I want is your lousy money—"

“Well, what if there wasn’t any money? What if I signed away all the rights to the money my father left me? That would make her believe us, wouldn’t it?”

Davey stood up and went to another part of the room, not showing his face. “Gee, that’s pretty drastic, Bonnie. I mean, that money’s yours when you come of age; you’re entitled to it.”

“I don’t care about the money, Davey!”

“Yeah, sure.” He chewed fiercely on a knuckle, thinking hard. “But there must be some other way, huh? There has to be.”

“Davey—”

“What?”

“You don’t care about the money, do you?”

He didn’t answer. Then he turned, and came to her with gleaming eyes.

“Listen, Bonnie. I’ve got an idea. It’s a crazy idea, and I won’t blame you for not going along with it.”

“What is it?”

“You remember what you said, what you told the old—what you told your mother up at the house? About your killing yourself?”

“Yes—” She shook her head in bewilderment. “What are you talking about, Davey?”

“She didn’t believe you, of course, nobody believes people when they talk wild like that. But if anything would make her realize that you really love me, I mean that this marriage was really important to you.”

Bonnie drew back, and Davey grinned soothingly.

“Look, don’t get me wrong. Kitten. I’m talking about a plan, a trick, that’s all I’m talking about. I mean, what if your mother really thought you were serious about killing yourself? Wouldn’t that make her change her mind in a hurry?”

“I suppose it would. But we couldn’t fool her about such a thing, Davey.”

“If we were smart we could. Just think a minute, Bonnie. If you really tried to commit suicide, only you didn’t try too hard, only enough to make it look good—”

“But how? How could I do such a thing?”

“There’s a couple of ways. A couple.” He stood up, beating his fists together. “Gas, for instance. I mean, we could fix up a phoney thing by

turning on the gas—" He stopped, seeing the pale color of her face. "Kitten, don't look like that. We'll just forget the whole thing—"

"No, go on, Davey. I'm listening."

"Well, maybe the easiest way would be—poison. Like iodine or something. That might be even more convincing, because then I'd have a doctor in, see, and he'd have to pump you out and—"

"Davey, I couldn't do that!"

"It doesn't have to be poison; it could be something else. Like sleeping pills." He grinned. "I've got some of those, Bonnie, that wouldn't hurt at all. You wouldn't take more than a couple, nothing that could really hurt you."

She was trembling. He put his arms around her and held her close, quieting her, and he kept on talking.

"You could write your mother a letter, Bonnie. You could tell her what you were planning to do, but that I don't know about it, see? You could say you were going to swallow a bottle of pills, but you actually wouldn't take more than a few. Then, when your mother shows up here—"

"It scares me, Davey! The whole thing scares me!"

"I promise you nothing will happen. Except that your mother will know you meant it, Bonnie. About loving me so much. You do love me that much, don't you?"

"I do! I do!" she said passionately, and kissed his handsome mouth.

She sat down that afternoon and composed the letter with Davey's assistance. It was brief, emotional, and final. Instead of the air of accusation which Bonnie produced in the first draft, Davey's editing gave it a tone of melancholy forgiveness. He grinned as he licked the seal of the envelope, as then raced downstairs to the corner mailbox.

They waited until the next afternoon before putting the plan into action. At three o'clock, the telephone rang shrilly, but Davey stopped the girl's attempts to lift the receiver.

"It may be her," he said. "She may have received the letter, and now she's calling you. Better let it ring."

They let it ring a dozen times. Then Bonnie, her hands shaking, found the vial of sleeping capsules in the medicine cabinet and brought it into the living room. He started to take the bottle from her, but changed his mind.

“You better do this all yourself,” he said. “Take out three—no, better make if four.”

“Davey, are you sure it’ll be all right?”

“Of course it will. It takes a dozen or more to hurt you. Besides, I’ll get a doctor over here as soon as possible. You can trust me, kitten.”

“I trust you, Davey.”

She shook four capsules into her palm. Then she carried a glass of water from the sink, and came back to the sofa.

“Davey,” she said.

“Yes, kitten?”

“Kiss me, Davey.”

He kissed her. Then she took the pills, swallowing them one at a time.

It was almost half an hour before she even felt drowsy. He suggested that she lie down in the bedroom. She agreed, picked up the near-empty bottle and went inside. She was asleep ten minutes later. He called her name, but she didn’t stir. He put on his topcoat and went downstairs. At the corner grocery, he bought cigarettes, milk, a loaf of bread. Through the grocery window he watched the front entrance of the brownstone apartment house, hoping that Bonnie’s mother would arrive. She didn’t.

He returned to the flat, and called Bonnie’s name loudly. She was deep in sleep. He wondered if he should alter the plan, call Mrs. Daniels and express concern, urge her to come over and see for herself what her stubbornness had caused. What if she hadn’t received the letter? Or, receiving, not believed it?

He was ready to pick up the telephone when he heard the sound of footsteps on the stairs. Then there was a hurried knock on the door.

He opened it, and had to restrain a grin of triumph. It was Bonnie’s mother, agitated, disheveled, fear-stricken, just as he wanted her.

“Where is she?” she said. “Where’s my daughter?”

“Bonnie?” he said innocently. “Why, she’s lying down. Sleeping, I guess. I just got home a couple of minutes ago.”

She started for the bedroom, and he caught her arm. “What is this?” he said. “What’s going on?”

She glared at him, and then fumbled in the pocket of her coat. She threw the letter at him without explanation, and then went to the bedroom.

A moment later, she screamed. It was a wail of anguish, so terrible and long-drawn that it made Davey, who was expecting it, start with surprise. He ran to the bedroom doorway, and saw Bonnie propped up in her mother's arms.

"She's dead!" the woman cried. "Bonnie's dead, she's dead, she's dead!"

"She can't be!" he shouted back. "She can't be dead!" He grabbed the bottle on the night table, glanced at the label with a convincingly shocked expression, and said: "A doctor! I'll get a doctor!"

The woman buried her head on Bonnie's chest; she was moaning, crooning an ancient sing-song of sorrow. Davey ran to the telephone; his fingers were stiff on the dial; his voice cracked when he asked for an ambulance. Inwardly, he was admiring his performance. When he replaced the receiver, he looked up to see the woman in the doorway.

"Too late," she said dully. "You're too late."

"You drove her to this!" he said, his anger genuine. "You made her do this! If you'd let her alone—"

"It wasn't me. It was you. She did this thing because of you."

"She's not dead, I tell you!" He brushed past her and went into the bedroom. He lifted Bonnie from the bed, and chafed her wrists. "Wake up, kitten," he said. "Wake up. It's all right, everything's all right. Wake up, kitten."

She was limp and unresponsive in his arms.

"Wake up now, Bonnie," he said. Her head lolled on her shoulder and fell against him. "Wake up," he said frantically. "For Pete's sake, it's all over now. You've got to wake up!"

He pried open an eyelid, and the pupil rolled back under it. The sight of the sightless, staring white terrified him, and he put his mouth to hers. He felt nothing. No movement of the flesh, no warmth, no whisper of breath.

"Bonnie!" he shouted. "Bonnie, will you please wake up? Will you *wake up?*"

"Leave her alone!" the woman said. "Can't you leave her alone, even now?"

"She can't be dead. There weren't many pills in the bottle—she couldn't have taken many—"

“She wouldn’t need much. Not with Bonnie’s heart. It wouldn’t take much—”

“What are you talking about?”

“Bonnie had rheumatic fever when she was fourteen. Her heart’s been weak ever since.”

Davey looked at the lax mouth, the limp arms, the eyes that no entreaty could open.

“Please,” he said. “Please, Bonnie, you’ve got to wake up.”

And an hour later, even when the ambulance physician pronounced the simple, inevitable verdict, even when the sheet covered the face plainer in death, Davey still muttered the question.

“Bonnie. . .Bonnie, will you please wake up?”

When the letter arrived in his mailbox a month after the funeral, Davey read and re-read its brief contents, searching for the meaning of the curt invitation.

Dear Mr. Snowden:

Would you kindly attend a meeting in the office of my attorneys, Hallman and Wilcox, 70 Wall Street, at ten-thirty A.M. April the third.

His first assumption was that they meant to do him harm, some mysterious legal harm he would be helpless against. But what could the old lady do? Bonnie was beyond reprisals now, and so was he. The second thought, that they were concerned about his making some claim against Bonnie’s estate, didn’t seem reasonable. He had already covered the question with Hellinger and Dowes, and they had assured him that he had no rights to any part of it.

On Wednesday, April the third, he put on his best suit and took a taxi to the attorneys’ downtown offices. They were large offices, as he expected, but modestly furnished. The man who greeted him was named Walter Hallman, and he was bald, paunchy, and painfully courteous.

“Right this way, Mr. Snowden,” he said. “Mrs. Daniels is in my office, waiting for you.”

“What’s this all about?” he said nervously. “Am I being sued?”

“Sued?” Hallman chuckled. “Of course not.”

The lawyer ushered him into the inner office. In a leather chair, still wearing mourning clothes, was Bonnie’s mother.

“Come in, Mr. Snowden,” she said, in a weary voice. “This won’t take very long.”

The lawyer took his place at the desk, and Davey sat on the sofa, clenching his hands between his knees.

“I wonder if you’re curious about my daughter’s estate?” Mrs. Daniels said. “In case you didn’t know, her inheritance from my late husband wasn’t due until she reached the age of twenty-one. Since her death, it automatically reverts to me. So you see, there is nothing you could possibly expect.”

“I didn’t expect anything,” he said belligerently.

“Very kind of you. I’m sure. However, Mr. Snowden, the fact that you did marry Bonnie imposes a certain amount of—obligation on me. You are my son-in-law, whether I enjoy the fact or not. As it happens, I don’t. But as it also happens, I feel that it is necessary to make some kind of settlement in regard to your welfare.”

Davey’s heart leaped. “I don’t understand.”

“You needn’t worry,” the woman said dryly. “I don’t intend to reward you for what you did to me and my daughter. I’m merely making one small donation. In her memory.”

The lawyer beamed. “I’m sure Mrs. Daniels is being very generous—”

“Shut up, Walter, I’ll tell him myself.” She deigned to look at Davey. “Mr. Snowden, you seemed fond of that old house of ours. You recall the one I mean?”

“Of course.”

“It was once valued at a great deal of money, but I doubt if it’s worth more than a few thousand today. But it’s yours, Mr. Snowden.”

He leaned back slowly. “You mean it? You really want me to have the house?”

“It would have been Bonnie’s in a few more years. I have no further use for it. You may have complete possession of the land, the house, and everything in it.”

“Everything? You really mean everything?”

“Of course. Mr. Hallman will see to the formalities. I merely wanted to let you know.”

“Gee, Mrs. Daniels—”

“Don’t thank me, please. I can stand anything from you now except gratitude.” She stood up. “And I sincerely hope, Mr. Snowden, that we never have occasion to meet again.”

She swept imperiously toward the door, with the lawyer bouncing out ahead of her to open it.

“Now then,” Hallman said, returning to his desk. “Let’s take care of all the details.”

“Mr. Hallman, could I ask just one question?”

“Certainly.”

“When Mrs. Daniels said I could have everything—well, there are certain places in the house—I mean, locked rooms and things like that. Am I entitled to all that?”

“You’re entitled to every stick in the place, Mr. Snowden. I’ll see that you get a full set of keys for every lock. Now—shall we get down to business?”

The sun was a red ball in the sky on the evening that Davey drove out to survey his new estate, and its reflection was repeated in every window of the old house, like a display of welcome flags.

He stopped the car in the driveway and reached into the glove compartment for the manila envelope stuffed with tagged keys. He separated two from the pile and put them in his pocket. Then he carried the envelope to the front door, and let himself in.

Nothing had changed since he had seen the old house last, but he looked at the cold fireplace, at the sofa turned to face flames long since dead, and felt no stirring of sad recollections. He gazed for only half a minute at the front room, and then was on his way to a more exciting errand.

He was winded by the time he reached the fourth floor. It was no trouble finding the locked door at the end of the corridor, even in the darkness. But the darkness made him fumble momentarily with the tagged key.

Finally, he felt the satisfying contact of the tumblers, and the locked door was no longer a barrier.

He was breathing hard. He hesitated a moment, trying to rationalize away his excitement. After all, there might be nothing at all of value in the room, no money, no hidden cache of jewels, no treasure.

There was only one way to learn the secret behind the door. He opened it, and stepped inside.

The house was a Sphinx, and, like a Sphinx, it was silent. But now the silence was broken deep within its walls, shattered by the hoarse, despairing scream that precedes sudden and violent death.

Walter Hallman had sat quietly during the visit of the police lieutenant, but once the door had closed behind the official, he stood up and faced his client with folded arms and frowning face.

"You lied to him," he said to Mrs. Daniels. "You knew perfectly well what you were doing when you deeded the house to Snowden."

"I knew," she said. "Are you going to give me away, Walter?"

"Of course not! But after all, there's such a thing as—well, morality."

The woman smiled thinly.

"I knew," she said. "I knew there was no treasure behind that door, Walter. Only the rotten floorboards that made us shut up the room fifteen years ago. I used to argue with my husband about it. I used to say we should have the floor repaired, that someone might fall through that terrible overhang and be dashed to pieces on the driveway. But he was a strangely miserly man, sometimes; so we locked up the room and forgot it."

She lifted her teacup from the table.

"It was an old, gloomy, drafty house, Walter. But you know, sometimes I think it really wasn't so bad."

Second Verdict

Aired: May 29, 1964

Teleplay by Alfred Hayes

Directed by Lewis Teague

Starring: Martin Landau and Frank Gorshin

They were coming back, I didn't try to read the verdict in their faces, not even when I caught the split-second smile from Juror Number Eight, the lady with the silver-blue hair who had paid so much motherly attention to my summation. I guessed that she was in my pocket from the third day of the trial, but I couldn't be sure if her smile was one of reassurance or maternal sympathy. Anyway, what was the use of speculating? Another thirty seconds and Rydell was either free or dead. I turned my eyes to the judge's bench.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury. . ."

On the seat beside me, a chip came off Rydell's stony composure. I tried to imagine what he was feeling, what it was like to stare out of his eyes at the puckered lips of the jury foreman, to hear with his ears the throat-clearing hack and the slow-spoken words that would promise him—what? The right to breathe, sleep late in the morning, drink cold beer, walk in the park? Or a shaved skull, a slit in the trousers, a last shuffling walk down a gray corridor? No, I couldn't imagine what Rydell was feeling. Nobody could. All I knew about was the throb in my own chest. Let it be all right, I thought; please God, let me have this one, I need it bad. A lawyer who loses two to the hangman doesn't need his name on the door, because nobody's going to knock. Call me hardhearted, but that's what I felt right then, facing a jury that had made up its mind.

"You will please read your verdict to the court."

Please, God, I thought. I will be kind to animals, generous to charity, and never, never take another drink.

"We find the defendant, Lewis Rydell, not guilty."

Well, hardly ever.

I was spun around by the arm, first by Schwartz, the assistant counsel, who wanted to shake my hand, and then by old man Ostrim who must have leaped the railing to get at me. Everybody was whooping and hollering in my ear, and I could see Rydell's lips moving but I couldn't hear what he

was saying. I swear I thought Ostrim was going to kiss me out of pure exultation, but that was a privilege reserved for his daughter. Karen had stayed home, but there would be plenty of time for private felicitations later. I got a kiss anyway, from Rydell's wife, and for a guy who was supposed to have killed for jealousy, Rydell took it like a sport. But maybe the biggest boot of all came from the judge himself I'd known Judge Lincoln Arthur since I was a kid, when my late father had been Linc's benchmate on the First Circuit. Not that it ever made any difference in a courtroom, because Linc was as hidebound as a law library and never played favorites. Nevertheless, I caught his congratulatory wink.

The five of us left the courtroom together, but we lost Schwartz in the corridor. Ostrim went next, pumping my hand again and reminding me about the victory celebration he had scheduled for that evening; then he vanished into the rear seat of his car and chauffeured off. That left the Rydells, and Lew Rydell said:

"I suppose we ought to settle up now, Mr. Murray, huh? Shall we go back to your office?"

"No hurry," I grinned. "If I were in your shoes, all I'd want to do is get drunk. Not that I'm recommending it."

"Lew doesn't drink," Melanie Rydell said coolly. "Lew doesn't have any vices, do you, Lew?"

"I'd like to settle this fee business," Rydell said. "I'd just as soon do it now, Mr. Murray, if it's okay with you."

"Sure," I said. "If that's what you want."

"We'll drop you off at the house," Rydell said to his wife, "You look tired."

"I am tired," Melanie said, but she didn't look tired. She looked beautiful. Melanie was one of those lynx-eyed blondes who couldn't ask for the time of day without making it sound like an invitation. Just the way she stood or sat or walked made men look at her lingeringly. It wasn't any mystery why Lew Rydell might have suffered jealous pangs at times.

I hailed a cab, and we dropped Melanie off at the Morton Street brownstone where the Rydells had spent the two years of their marriage, where a wide-eyed young grocery clerk named Yost had ended his life at the bottom of a flight of cellar steps, his thin neck twisted and broken.

“I’ll be home in a couple of hours,” Rydell said. “We’ll go out to dinner, huh? Lasagna and wine and everything. We’ve got a lot of celebrating to do, Melanie.”

“Sure,” she said wearily, and kissed him on the cheek. Then we drove downtown to the offices of Ostrim, Wright and Morgan, Attorneys-at-Law.

For some reason, my own office, two doors down the hall from Ostrim’s, seemed peculiarly small. Its single window was dirty, and the desk surface was insufficient to hold the stacks of documents and reports accumulated there. It hadn’t looked so small to me at the conclusion of my last case. I’d come back from the court that day with the foreman’s “guilty” ringing in my ears, and felt grateful for the smug security of that little room. But it seemed too small now, no question. I’d have to tell Ostrim that.

“I’ve been thinking over your suggestion,” Rydell said, “about the method of payment. I figured out that I can pay two hundred and fifty a month until the debt’s settled. Would that be okay?”

“I’m sure that would be fine.”

“You want me to sign a paper or anything?”

“That’s not necessary,” I said. “We didn’t have to come to the office to settle that. I told you so in the cab.”

“I wanted to come here,” Rydell said. “I guess I just didn’t want to face Melanie for a couple of hours. I needed an excuse to get away. Do you understand?”

“Sure,” I said, and looking at his drawn, ashy face I discovered that I did. Rydell was a plain-looking man who might have had some boyish charm ten years ago, but had lost too much hair and gained too many creases since. He had a dead-flesh look, except for his eyes, bulbous eyes with an oily shine.

“How about that drink?” I said quietly. “I keep a bottle here.”

“Swell,” he said. “I’d like a drink now.”

I poured one for both of us and proposed a toast to something innocuous, like happy times. Rydell suggested that we toast Melanie and I agreed. He knocked back the whiskey in nothing flat, and the effect of the lubricant seemed to make his eyes glow brighter than before.

“She’s beautiful, isn’t she?” he said.

“Mrs. Rydell? Yes, a very lovely woman.”

“She can’t help herself, you know, the way men bother her all the time. They look at her and get the wrong idea. It’s not her fault.”

“No,” I said.

“She’s not bright about it, she doesn’t know the way men think. Like the way she answers the door sometimes, in that sloppy housecoat of hers. She gives people ideas, like that kid Yost. I feel sorry for that kid, you know that?”

“I know you do,” I said. “It’s just too bad he had to get himself mugged the day after you threw him out of the house. You wouldn’t have gone through all this.”

Rydell got his own second drink. He sipped it this time, brooding into the glass.

“Yeah, I feel sorry for him. But I’d do the same thing again, that’s the way I am. I get a red fire in my brain and I can’t stop myself.” His head came up slowly. “I owe you a lot, Mr. Murray. More than money.”

“Forget it. Just learn to keep your temper.”

“I really killed that boy, you know.”

I put down my glass. A buzzer went off in my head and the taste of the whiskey in my mouth went sour.

“Yes, I did,” Rydell said, smiling sadly. “I waited for him the next day and grabbed him. He was a scrawny kid; it was like wringing the neck of a chicken. I took all his money just to make it look like a robbery. It’s funny, you know? I couldn’t bring myself to spend that money, I threw it away, every nickel.”

“Shut up!” I yelled. “For God’s sake, shut up!”

“I’ll do the same thing again, if I have to. These men who bother my wife, they’ve got to learn.” He stood up. “I better go now,” he said. “Melanie’s expecting me.”

I beat him to the door.

“You lied to me,” I said. “Every stinking word you told me was a lie!”

“I couldn’t tell you the truth, could I?” He was still smiling, only the sadness was gone and he was enjoying my anger. “You were supposed to get me off, Mr. Murray. That’s what you were hired for, and that’s what you did.”

“What do you think I am? You think I would have let you plead innocent when—”

"No, of course, you wouldn't." Rydell said reasonably. "So you see how right I was, don't you?"

"Look, Rydell—"

"I have to go now, Mr. Murray."

"You think it's that simple?" My hand became a fist and I wanted to smash that smiling, oily-eyed face. "You think you can just walk out of here and—"

"Melanie's waiting for me," he said. "She likes to eat dinner early, Mr. Murray, I really have to go."

I couldn't think of anything to do but step aside. Rydell opened the door and went out. I could hear his footsteps in the corridor, the slow, measured tread of a man who wasn't in any hurry.

I was sorry I hadn't hit him. The release of anger would have been better than what I was feeling now. It had been a long drop from that height of elation, and I damned the compulsion that had made Rydell tell the truth. It was bad enough that he lied to me, bad enough that I had defended a killer and rescued him from the vengeance of the law.

But why did he have to *tell* me?

I went to Ostrim's party anyhow. Don't ask me why. My first thought was to call the old man and claim that I was sick, exhausted, running a fever. I didn't want my victory celebrated. I couldn't stand that much irony. But I went, mostly because Karen was there and I needed to see her.

Ostrim's fancy duplex was filled with fancy-looking people, men in evening clothes and women in satiny dresses with pearl and diamond accents. It was a peculiar slice of society. Except for a few personal friends, and a handful of lawyers—they were the ones in the dark blue suits, looking sheepish and mumbling to each other in the corners—the guests were clients and ex-clients. Some couldn't make the party, of course; they were too busy serving time in state or federal prisons. Those attending were the lucky ones. I wondered how many were "lucky" the way Rydell had been.

Ostrim's houseboy took my coat and hat and grinned a couple of inches wider to let me know that he recognized me as the guest of honor. The old man bellowed happily when he saw me, and grabbed me by the nape of the neck. "Hold it, everybody, hold it," he announced. "Here's the man we've been waiting for. Ned Murray, folks, greatest trial lawyer since Clarence. . .no, since Harry Ostrim!"

They laughed and cheered and applauded, and I hated myself for being stupid enough to lap it up. Somebody shoved a drink in my hand and I was quickly surrounded by well-wishers. I got thumped on the back a dozen times, and the women rustled about me with adoring smiles as if I were a movie star after a successful premiere. I tossed off that first drink in a hurry and was promptly handed another. It was funny how soon the memory of Rydell's office visit was obliterated, how simple it seemed to forget everything but the triumph. I was exhilarated again. I told myself that, guilty or innocent, I had done the job I was hired for, and done it well. I had earned all this; I deserved it.

Then Karen pushed her way through the crowd and gave them all a demonstration of her prerogative. She slipped her arms around me, and in the center of that laughing circle, we kissed. I stopped hearing their whistles and applause. For me, this was the only congratulatory message that meant a thing.

After a while, they left us alone and Karen steered me off into a corner.

"Father says you were terrific," she told me. "He says you were everything he used to be in a courtroom. And there's no higher praise than that, coming from him." She giggled.

"Let's forget about it," I said. "The trial's over."

"I don't want to forget about it. I'm proud of you, Ned. You know how guilty that man seemed to be, and yet—"

"There's too much fuss about it. Rydell wasn't anybody special."

"He was special to Father. Father said if you could win this case you could do anything, that it meant a lot in business to the firm. Do you know what I think? He's not going to wait on that promise, about the junior partnership. I think it's going to be sooner than you expect."

That was what I wanted. I couldn't be blamed for the way my pulse speeded up when Karen said that.

She put her lips next to my ear. "You'll have to stop making excuses pretty soon, lover. You'll have to name the day."

Ten minutes later, Tony Eigo came in. I'd never seen Tony at Ostrim's before. He didn't like parties. Tony's tailor was probably better than Ostrim's, but he didn't look comfortable in his evening suit. He kept smoothing his hand over the crinkly gray hairs at his temple, and looking

around nervously as if hoping to find a friendly face. He spotted mine, and his tanned features lit up with a whitetoothed grin.

"Hey, Ned," he said. "You still shake hands with ordinary people? Big celebrity like you?"

"Knock it off," I said. "Karen, you know Tony Eigo."

"Yes," she said, with a frozen smile. "Excuse me. I'd better hostess a little." She got up and left. That was one thing about Karen; college and everything, her manners weren't the best. Tony didn't notice, or pretended not to. He sat down in the seat she had vacated.

"I was in court today," Tony said. "I been there the last four days. Bet you didn't even notice, hah?"

"No," I said. "That's nice of you, Tony, a busy man like you."

"I got a personal interest," he said. That embarrassed him, and he lit a cigarette. "How do you get a drink in this joint?"

I went over to the bar and got him one. I saw Ostrim looking at me sideways, and not with approval. He didn't like Tony Eigo, even if he always invited him, trusting to Tony's sense of propriety to keep him away. Well, Tony didn't want to keep away this night, and that was all right with me. Tony was more than an ex-client; he was my friend. I never boasted about the fact, but it was true.

I met him during my first year at Ostrim, Wright and Morgan. He wasn't the kind of client they welcomed, an entrepreneur of the underworld, a man who couldn't see the dividing line between criminal enterprise and legitimate business. Sometimes that line gets hazy, and the law steps in to define it.

That year, he was threatened with more than a rap on the knuckles. He was indicted for murder. Only Tony was innocent. He proved it to me, and I proved it to the court. I think even Ostrim was surprised. He'd foreseen a fat fee, and a guilty verdict, and no loss of reputation. I was the new boy, and I could afford to absorb the licking.

But I didn't. I got Tony off, and Tony wouldn't forget it, not if he lived to be a hundred.

I brought Tony his drink and he saluted me with it.

"Here's health," he said. "That guy Rydell was lucky having you."

"Thanks," I said.

"My wife, Theresa, she didn't like him. She didn't like the look of him."

"How's Theresa feeling these days?"

"Good, fine." Tony squinted at me. "What's the matter, Ned?"

"Matter?" I grinned. "Nothing."

"Come on, I got eyes. For a guy who just won a case, you look like a loser. You look like somebody just dropped a four-horse parley."

"I'm tired, I guess. The strain of the whole thing."

"Yeah, sure," Tony said. "Look, I'm sorry I scared your girl away. I can drift off and you catch up to her."

"Plenty of time for that. I haven't seen you in months, Tony."

"Yeah, that's right." He blew smoke between his knees and shielded his eyes. "Look, Ned, you remember what I told you once, huh? You got any troubles you can't handle, I want to hear about them. You got a favor coming from me, and it bothers me not to pay off."

"That was a long time ago, Tony. You don't owe me a thing."

"I keep good books," he said. "Don't tell me who I owe what." He punched my arm, and grinned. "Go on, find that girl of yours. Maybe she can cheer you up."

I was all right until the party was over, until I didn't have people around me to tell me what a great guy I was, and what a smashing victory I had won. When I was alone with myself, standing at the wall kitchen in my one-and-a-half rooms and warming a glass of milk, I couldn't remember the words of praise and congratulations. All I could recall was Lew Rydell's voice.

I really killed that boy, you know.

And I let him walk out. Easy as that. Rydell must have enjoyed himself, telling me that, knowing how it would make me feel. Maybe he was proud of it secretly, needing to boast of it, as long as he was out of danger.

Yes, he was out of danger. I suppose he realized that. The law of double jeopardy protected him from another trial; he couldn't be charged twice with the same crime. Technically, I wouldn't accomplish much by putting his confession on the desk of the district attorney. I couldn't prove it, anyway. Hadn't I just gone to court to prove the opposite?

No, I had to forget it. It was the only thing that made sense, a convenient case of amnesia.

I'll do the same thing again if I have to. These men who bother my wife, they've got to learn.

That was the real problem. Yost, the grocery boy, nothing would put the roses back in his cheeks or the whistle back on his lips. But Melanie was still a beautiful woman, and there would be other men who might read the wrong idea in her violet eyes, as the boy had.

I had trouble falling asleep. The idea that finally permitted sleep to come was a resolution to see Melanie Rydell the next day.

"Come in," she said. "Lew isn't home, you know. He went to see Mr. Fleming about going back to the company. You don't think he'll have any trouble, do you?"

"I knew he wasn't home," I said.

I took a seat without removing my topcoat. The apartment was in disorder, and so was Melanie. There was one curler still hanging limply from the back of her hair.

"Do you think they'll give him his job back?" she said, her eyes worried. "He was their best salesman before. . .before the trouble. They won't hold it against him, will they?"

"I don't know," I said, "I don't think they will."

"We're running awful short of money." She bit her lip, perhaps recognizing me as a creditor. "Can I get you a soft drink or something? There isn't any whiskey."

"I don't want anything. Would you sit down, Mrs. Rydell? I want to ask you a few things."

"Sure," she said.

I'd rehearsed my questions on the way up, but now I didn't feel very glib.

"Mrs. Rydell, before the trial, you told me that your husband was the jealous type, didn't you?"

"Yes. Lew's funny that way, I told you."

"But there was never any reason for his jealousy?"

She stiffened. "Look, I don't see why we have to go through all that again. The trial's over, isn't it?"

"Please," I said. "It's more important than you think. This delivery boy, Yost. . .I tried to underplay Lew's anger about him in court, but Lew was really pretty sore about that pass he made, wasn't he?"

"But I told you all that! Yes, Lew was sore. He went absolutely crazy, that's how he is. I didn't even want him to know about what the kid did, I

was afraid he'd—" She pursed her lips. "Well, do what he did. Rough up the kid."

I chose my next words carefully.

"Mrs. Rydell, the trial's over, just as you said. Nobody could charge Lew with the crime again; that's the law in this state. So you've got nothing to lose by telling me the absolute truth."

"What do you mean?"

"Lew did kill that boy, didn't he?"

I watched her face. It looked as if I'd just slapped it.

"That's a dirty lie. How could you of all people—"

"All right, maybe you didn't know the truth. But please understand what I'm telling you now. Lew murdered Yost. His anger got the better of him, and that's what happened."

"Get out of here!"

"Please sit down. I'm not through. The reason I'm so sure about this is because Lew told me himself. Yesterday, in my office. I don't know why he decided to tell me the truth, but he did."

"You're a damned liar!" Melanie's eyes filled, and she pointed a finger at the door. "You get out of here, Mr. Murray, you get out and don't come back."

"I asked you to please *sit down!*"

She must have been a little bit afraid of me. She sat down, slowly, and watched me like I was a snake coiling to strike.

"I don't enjoy telling you this," I said. "When your husband told me, I wanted to shut my ears just the way you do now. But it's too late. We know the truth and we have to face it." I leaned toward her. "The important thing is this. He's not going to change because of the trial. He's an insanely jealous man, and he might very well do the same thing all over again."

The tears spilled, but she made no sound.

"That's why I had to see you. I had to let you know how it is with Lew. He got away with murder, and that makes me sick to my stomach, but there's not much I can do about it. Maybe you can do something about it the next time."

"The next time?" Her voice shook.

"You've got to be careful. Do you understand? You know him better than anybody, and you know what he's capable of You've got to make sure

he doesn't have any reason to be jealous."

"Listen! If you think I—"

"I don't think anything. But if Lew thinks you're playing around, even if he misunderstands your behavior, somebody else might get killed. It might even be easier for him the next time. He got away with it once."

"I'd never do a thing like that! I love Lew—"

"Sure," I said. "Sure you do. And that's why I thought I'd warn you, Mrs. Rydell. If you love Lew, then be careful. That's all I wanted to say."

I stood up and went to the door. I looked back at her and she wasn't moving, not a hair.

I let myself out, feeling a little better about the way things were.

I came into the office the next morning and found a message on my desk.

Mr. Ostrim would like to see you. L.

I went into the old man's office and found the window blinds drawn, all six of them. Ostrim was behind the desk, looking like a thundercloud. The leather chair in front was filled by Lew Rydell, his topcoat in his lap and a cigarette in his hand.

"Sit down, Ned," Ostrim said.

I sat down, without looking at Rydell. Just the sight of him knotted my stomach.

"Mr. Rydell's told me something I find hard to believe. I said he must be mistaken, but he swears it's true. Did you go to see Mrs. Rydell yesterday?"

"Yes," I said.

I heard Rydell breathe out smoke or relief, I didn't know which.

"Why did you think it necessary to see Mrs. Rydell?"

"I had something to tell her," I said. "It was strictly an unofficial visit."

"You told her I was guilty," Rydell said hoarsely. "You went up there deliberately, just to frighten her. I ought to sue you for what you did, Mr. Murray, lawyer or no lawyer."

Ostrim's eyes were almost pleading. "What kind of nonsense is this, Ned? You didn't say any such thing, did you? I can't believe it."

"Yes, sir, I did. I didn't go there to frighten her, just to warn her. Right after the trial, Mr. Rydell here obliged me with a nice little confession. A little late," I added bitterly.

"A confession? What are you talking about?"

“It’s a lie,” Rydell said. “I don’t know what you’ve got against me, Mr. Murray. I never heard of a lawyer behaving like this. I didn’t kill that boy. The jury said so. You’ve got no right to persecute me or my wife.”

“Ned,” Ostrim said plaintively. “Ned, please, don’t make a mess of things now. If Mr. Rydell said something foolish, something that led you to believe—”

“Mr. Rydell put it bluntly. He said he killed Yost. He said he’d kill again if another Yost came along. That’s the way it was, Mr. Ostrim. You think I didn’t feel like two cents? I was ready to go to the district attorney—”

Now Rydell was on his feet, his dead-flesh face momentarily activated by anger, his oily eyes popping. “It’s over! The trial’s over! They can’t put me through that again, they can’t!”

“No, no,” Ostrim soothed, “of course they can’t, Mr. Rydell, there’s nothing to get excited about. Mr. Murray just misunderstood you, that’s all,” he assured.

“I read him loud and clear,” I said. “I knew I couldn’t get him back in a courtroom if I went to the D.A., not for killing Yost. But he’d be a lot more careful with his hands the next time.”

“I’ll sue you!” Rydell screamed. He whirled on Ostrim and shook his finger as if scolding a child. “You hear me, Mr. Ostrim? You don’t stop him from talking that way. I’ll sue this firm for slander!”

“Please, Ned.” Ostrim brushed sweat from his wide forehead. “Apologize to Mr. Rydell, tell him you didn’t mean it.”

“Apologize? Yes, I should apologize. To the State, for saving his skin —”

Ostrim came out from behind the desk and planted himself in front of me. The thundercloud was a storm now.

“Now you listen to me,” he said, in a threatening rumble. “I don’t know what went on between you and this man, and I don’t care. But he’s a client, understand, my client, even if you handled the case. Anything you do reflects on me, on the way I run this firm. Mr. Rydell got a fair trial—”

“Better than fair,” I said.

“Yes, and the jury acquitted him, that’s all we have to know. You don’t have any right to violate any confidences he made to you, I don’t care what they were. Didn’t they teach you that in law school?”

“They taught me something else,” I said. “They taught me that a lawyer’s main concern was for justice.”

Ostrim let me see his teeth. “You young cub! Are you trying to tell me about justice? What gives you the right to lecture me?”

“I didn’t mean it that way—”

“What do you think I’m operating here, some two-bit shyster club? Is that how you think I built this business?”

“Look, Mr. Ostrim—”

“You talk about justice, huh? Go talk to that hoodlum buddy of yours, that Tony Eigo. If there was justice, you think that crook would be walking around loose?”

My cheeks were burning, all the hotter because I could see Rydell’s face, and there was a grin on it a mile wide.

“All right,” I said. “I wasn’t trying to needle you, Mr. Ostrim. But what I told you was the truth.”

“I don’t care what you told me.”

I turned on my heel and went to the door. I didn’t want to see the faces I left behind me. I heard Ostrim bellow, “Ned!” but that didn’t stop me either. I went down the hall, past my own office, past my secretary’s bewildered stare, and left the building.

I was in the living room, working on the second third of the bottle, when the doorbell rang. I’d already hung up on three phone calls, one from Schwartz and two from Ostrim himself, but I should have known they wouldn’t let it go at that. This time, they sent a personal emissary, and the best they had.

“Hello, Ned,” Karen said. “Look what I brought you.”

She handed me a small oblong package, and I looked at it stupidly. “What is it?” I asked, my tongue thick. I hadn’t had lunch, and the whiskey was numbing me nicely.

“Open it,” she said. “It’s that pipe you told me you were so crazy about, the one with the ivory carving. I was saving it for some special occasion, but your birthday isn’t for six months.”

I went back into the room, fumbling with the package. Karen took it from me with a smile, and removed the pipe. Then she went over to the birchwood humidor I kept on my desk and filled it carefully.

“I know how to do this,” she said. “Pack a little tighter on the bottom, looser on top. I used to do it for father all the time, even when I was a little girl.”

She brought the pipe to me on the sofa, and I said, “Forget it, Karen. If you’re going to bribe me, I prefer cash.”

“Really?” She slid down the sofa arm into my lap. “I thought I’d use my sex appeal. I understand that’s sure-fire.”

I kissed her, because I wanted to. Then I pushed her away and went to get another drink. She watched me, and then she started to laugh.

“What’s funny?” I said.

“The whole thing. You. Father. He told me about that scene in the office. I wish I could have been there. It must have been like Clarence Harrow and Williams Jennings Bryan.”

“It wasn’t,” I growled. “It was stupid and childish. And all because of that—”

“Yes, all because of that silly little man with the pop eyes. Men! Honestly! All that fuss over nothing at all.” She tucked her legs under her. “But don’t misunderstand me, darling. I think father was just as much to blame, and I told him so. He feels just awful about the whole thing.”

“I’ll bet he does.”

“For heaven’s sake, Ned, why would you want to spoil things now? All right, so maybe that idiotic man did kill the grocery boy. I’m not saying he didn’t. You don’t think it’s the first time that a guilty man has—”

I slammed my glass down so hard that ice cubes flew. “It’s the first time for me! That’s all I care about!”

“But was it, darling? Was it really? That man Eigo—”

“Tony was innocent! I defended an innocent man.”

“Innocent of that crime, maybe. But what about all the others? He might have killed a dozen men, or had them killed.”

“He wasn’t being tried for killing a dozen men, only one. And he was innocent of that.”

The amusement went out of her.

“I should know better than to talk to you when you’re drinking. Your stubborn streak just gets calcified.”

“Did your father ask you to come here?”

“It was my own idea.”

“Why?” I said. “Did you think you could change my mind? I’m going to the D. A. tomorrow, Karen. Even if it doesn’t do a bit of good, I’ll feel better for it.”

“Do you know what the D.A. will say? He’ll say you’re a fool. That’s what everybody will say.”

“I don’t care.”

“You haven’t got a shred of proof, not a shred. And all the proof in the world wouldn’t put Rydell back on the stand. You know that, don’t you?”

“I know it. Like your father says, Karen, I went to law school.”

“Do you know what else he says? He says that if you go to the D.A. tomorrow you can find yourself another connection.”

Drunk or sober, that stopped me.

“And what about you?” I asked. “What about the connection between you and me?”

She swung her feet to the floor, and looked at her pointed toes.

“I wanted long enough for you to get serious about me, Ned. I can wait a little longer, until you come to your senses.”

“That’s the real bribe, isn’t it?” I sneered. “That’s what Daddy told you to say, huh?”

She flared up like a cheap match.

“He didn’t have to tell me what to say, counselor. I make up my own speeches. So put that in your pipe and smoke it.”

She picked up her wrap from the armchair and threw it over her shoulders. I’d seen Karen in a temper before, and you might as well try to stop a locomotive. She went out of the apartment at full steam, slamming the door.

I went to work on the second third in that bottle, because it seemed like the logical thing to do. An angry drunk is the worst kind, and the next thing I remembered was looking down at the white ivory pipe on the floor and wondering how it got there. When I bent down to pick it up, I saw the patent leather shoes and knife-like creases of Tony Eigo’s trousers. I didn’t know how Tony had gotten there either, or why he was sitting in the opposite chair with that small patient smile on his brown, Mediterranean face.

“That’s a nice pipe,” he said softly. “You shouldn’t treat it that way, Ned.”

"What are you doing here?"

"I'm an invited guest, remember?" He chuckled. "No, I guess maybe you don't. You called me about half an hour ago, said to come up and have a drink with you. Well, here I am. You want me to cut out?"

"Yeah, that's right," I said blearily. "Have a drink, Tony. Here's to crime." I fumbled for my glass. There wasn't anything in it but flavored ice.

"I don't think I'll join you," Tony said. "You're too far ahead of me. You want to start fresh, okay. I'll put on some coffee and we'll talk about it."

"You know what?" I said. "I think I'm going to be sick."

Fifteen minutes later, Tony had a steaming cup of coffee under my nose.

"Celebration's going on a long time, Ned. What's the matter?"

"Through celebrating," I said. "Now I'm commiserating. That's the word, right? Com-mis-erating. With that poor slob Yost, that dumb kid from the grocery store."

My eyes were just coming into focus, and I could read the puzzlement on Tony's face. It was the friendliest face I knew right then, maybe the only face that would react the right way to the story I had to tell.

So I told it. I told him about Lew Rydell, the popeyed crazy jealous killer who couldn't keep his mouth shut. I told him about our little meeting in the office, about Rydell's lie and Ostrim's threats, and the kiss from Karen that was really a kiss-off. I was right. Tony's face was understanding. His eyes reflected the pain I was feeling, and his mouth tightened in sympathetic indignation.

"And they can't get him?" he said bitterly. "They can't nail this crumb?"

"Double jeopardy, Tony, you know how it goes. One trial to a customer."

"They've hung better guys than him. And he walks out free as air."

"That's how it is. That's the law."

"The law," Tony said dryly.

"That statue of Justice, Tony, you know what's wrong with her? She out to be bending over a little backwards, that's how she should look. We bent over so far backward that Rydell's out on the street, just waiting to wring some other sucker's neck."

"He ought to be stopped," Tony said. "A guy like that."

"Sure, you tell me how."

“He ought to pay the penalty. Like everybody else.”

“It’s too late,” I said, shaking my head. “Too late, Tony.”

“Too late for the law, maybe.”

I didn’t know what he was thinking. I was too fuzzy to comprehend the process of logic going on in his head. I just sat there, sipping the hot coffee and feeling sorry for myself.

Then Tony said, “I been waiting a long time, Ned. I never figured out what I could do you for, what kind of favor might be important. Now I know.”

“What’s that? How do you mean, favor?”

“It won’t be just for you,” he smiled. “I guess I’d be doing everybody a favor, the whole state. Only I mean it for you, Ned, remember that.”

I heard his footsteps, and realized that he was on his way out. I got off the chair as fast as my aching head would allow me to move, and went to intercept him.

“Wait a minute, wait a minute!” I said. “What the heck did you just say, Tony? What’s on your mind?”

“Nothing, kid, nothing,” he smiled sleepily. “Come on, I did my good deed for today. Let me out of here now.”

“Tony, where are you going?”

“On my rounds, where else? You know I’m a busy guy. I always got people to see and things to do.” He slapped my arm. “You get to bed. You’ll need your strength for that hangover tomorrow.”

“I want to know what you mean by a favor.”

I looked him in the eyes, and I knew.

“You’re thinking of killing Rydell.”

“You see too many movies, kid.”

“Tony, don’t be crazy! I don’t want that kind of favor, understand?”

“Yeah, sure. Just let him loose, huh? So what if he gets away with murder. Plenty of guys do that. You told me yourself, a nut like Rydell, he’s a sure thing to try it again—”

“Killing him’s no answer!”

“Sure, so let some other slob get knocked off, huh? That’s better?”

“I didn’t mean all those things I said, Tony. You got the wrong idea!”

“This guy didn’t just kill a grocery boy. He’s killing you too, buddy, and that’s what I care abut. You don’t have to worry. Nothing’s going to rub off

on you." He grinned lopsidedly. "I know my business, Ned, just like you know yours."

"Tony!"

But he was out the door, and down the hall, and into the elevator before he could hear another protest.

I looked at my watch, and it said twenty minute past seven. It was a long day.

I flopped into a chair and kneaded my pulsing temples with my thumbs. I went into the bathroom, shook three aspirins into my hand, and swallowed them.

I saw myself in the mirror of the medicine cabinet, and was shocked by the placid face that looked back at me. Eyes a little red-rimmed, hair mussed, but not the face I should have seen. It should have been drawn and haggard, suffering the pains of an anguished conscience.

But the face was placid, and I began to wonder how my conscience really worked.

"You can't let him do this," I said aloud.

My face looked back at me, and silently it answered, "Why not?"

Angrily, I switched off the light so I couldn't see myself. Then I went back into the living room and headed for the telephone. I had alternatives. I didn't have to let things stand this way. Not the police, that was out. I wasn't going to sacrifice Tony for Rydell, not for anything. Ostrim? I knew what he thought of Tony.

The only sensible course was to call Rydell himself. A warning. I wouldn't have to explain it, I wouldn't even have to identify myself. . .But would he believe me, identified or anonymous?

I picked up the phone, and put it right down again.

But maybe Tony was right. It wasn't murder, it was an execution, the carrying out of a delayed sentence. It wasn't a meaningless killing, it was preventative war.

Suddenly, I knew the man I wanted to call. The only one I could talk to, who would give me the answer I wanted.

I dialed information.

"I want the number of Mr. Lincoln Arthur, 14 East Hamil Street."

Linc wasn't judgelike outside of a courtroom. In his billowing black robes, supported by desk and gavel, it was easy to conjure up a stern visage

and indomitable jaw. Actually, he was round-faced and plump-jowled, more like a gentle schoolmaster than a dispenser of justice. He made me feel like a schoolboy, too, the way I was fumbling with my remarks like a kid who hadn't done his homework.

"Let's slow it down," he said quietly, leaning back in his study chair. "I can't follow this story of yours, Ned. Is it a parable or what?"

"It's more like a riddle," I said glumly. "A legal riddle. Only I already know the answer."

"All right," he smiled. "Let's see if I know it."

I took a deep breath.

"It's about a lawyer," I said. "A criminal lawyer, who defends somebody for murder and does it successfully. He's convinced of his client's innocence, understand, and his own conviction helps him in getting the acquittal. But right after the verdict, he makes a discovery. His client's guilty, see?"

"How does he make this discovery?"

"Is that important?"

"It might be. Was it on evidence that had appeared in the trial? Evidence he had misinterpreted, or concealed unknowingly?"

"No," I said. "It was a confession."

"How does he obtain this confession?"

"It's given to him, unsolicited, by his client."

"Why?" Linc asked bluntly.

"I don't know why! But there he is. He knows the truth about his client, and he knows something worse. That the man is more than capable of committing a similar crime, and he boasts of the possibility almost gleefully."

"Any witnesses to this confession?"

"No. And when he's confronted with it, the client denies having every made it."

Linc rubbed his chin. "You're not asking a legal question, Ned. I'm sure you know where your—hypothetical lawyer stands legally. In the middle of nowhere. Is this a moral question?"

"You might say that. If you were that lawyer. Judge, what would you do?"

It had begun to rain, the first swollen drops thumping against the window behind the judge's desk. Linc stood up creakily and went to secure the latch. I'd forgotten what an old man he had become. I began to regret having bothered him with questions that couldn't be answered.

"If I were that lawyer," he said, after sitting down again, "and if I were your age, I suppose I'd do what you're doing now, Ned. I'd get angry, with my client, with myself, even with the law. But if I were practicing now, I think I'd feel different."

"How different?"

"I wouldn't feel anger. Only pity."

I couldn't help showing my disgust. "Pity? For a man like that?"

"Yes, exactly for that kind of man. A man who feels a compulsion to confess must have have felt a similar compulsion to kill. They are symptoms of the same disease. And if there's one thing the law's learned in this century, it's the ability to feel compassion for the sick."

"He's sick, all right, but that doesn't—"

"Ned!" He spoke so sharply that I looked into his face and saw courtroom sternness in his eyes. "This parable of yours. Are you talking about Rydell?"

"Yes," I said.

"He told you that he murdered Yost?"

"He did, judge, I swear it. In my own office, the same day of the verdict. I think he got a kick out of it."

"Yes," Linc said. "I suppose he did."

"He knew he was safe enough, that he couldn't be indicted again—"

"The rationale of the irrational."

"What?"

"For God's sake, Ned, use your brains! Can't you see the man's mentally ill? Everything points to it. He killed a boy just for putting an arm around his wife. He confesses when there's no need to confess. Is it worthwhile venting all this anger against a sick man?"

"But he's dangerous! He'll do this again, judge, if a man just looks cross-eyed at his wife it'll be another excuse for murder!"

"If he had confessed to you before the trial was over, if he had been found guilty—"

"Yes, if! Then he'd be were he belonged. In the death house."

“You’re forgetting something, Ned. I was the judge at the trial. It was my prerogative to pass out sentence, not yours.”

“It was first-degree murder! Premeditated!”

“Do you think that would make any difference? There isn’t any automatic death sentence. The right to determine the penalty was mine.”

“You mean you wouldn’t have—”

Linc stood up behind his desk, and suddenly, even without benefit of robes, he was the judge again.

“No,” he said quietly. “If the jury had brought me a guilty verdict, Ned, I wouldn’t have sent Rydell to his death. I know just what I would have done. I would have recommended psychiatric examination with a view to confinement in an institution for the criminally insane.”

I felt nothing when Linc spoke. No pang of regret of flush of guilt. I didn’t feel the floor beneath my feet or the pressure of my hands on the arm of my chair. I sat there, staring blankly at Linc’s face, suspended in a vacuum of emotion, unwilling to come out of it and face my thoughts. I had gotten the answer I was looking for, from the only man qualified to give it. But there was another man, a smiling, brown-faced man carrying a burden of gratitude that would make Linc’s judgment meaningless.

“I have to go,” I said, forcing myself out of the chair. “Thanks, judge,” I mumbled. “Thanks a lot.”

“Ned, you shouldn’t let this upset you so much.”

“I’m sorry,” I said. “There’s something I have to do.”

The rain had become a downpour, and the streets of the city were black and glossy. Now that I knew what I had to do, it was as if God and the taxi company had conspired to prevent my doing it. I stood on the corner, whistling shrilly at cabs that, empty or occupied, rolled by heedlessly. I didn’t know the neighborhood, didn’t understand the intricacies of the local subway or bus lines, and the place I had to be was forty city blocks away. I thought of telephoning Rydell again, trying to frame the words that would convince him of his peril. I thought of calling Tony, too, but nobody reached Tony after nightfall. Those were his working hours. I walked through the wet streets, praying that Tony wouldn’t be working tonight, not on the job he had promised to do. I crossed my fingers.

I stepped off the pavement at an intersection and a cab almost ran me down. A woman got out, shrieked at what the rain was doing to her hair and

ran for shelter. I grabbed the door handle and jumped into the back seat, shouting the address of Lew Rydell's brownstone.

I was cold and miserable, and I was in no mood for cab driver conversation. But he was a talkative one, and I had to listen to the complaints: Friday night traffic, the weather, the tipping habits of dames, the shortage of power hitters on the local ball club. I wanted to say, shut up, buddy, you want to hear troubles? I could tell you some.

We hit every light. We ran into a construction muddle in midtown that slowed us down to a crawl. Every tick of the meter was like a heartbeat. I kept thinking; maybe Tony won't do it. Maybe he was bluffing. Maybe it wouldn't be tonight, and there would still be time.

We headed crosstown at last. I leaned close to the streets, counting off the blocks.

Then we were there, at Morton Street, and my first thought was: Too late!

"Hey, what's goin' on?" the driver said. "Somethin' must have happened, huh? Look at the cops."

There were two police cars flanking the entrance at Lew Rydell's brownstone, and an ambulance was parked across the street. Even in the rain a crowd had collected, pushing each other, jockeying for views, desperately trying for closer looks at whatever tragedy was available.

I dropped two bills in the driver's lap and slammed out of the taxi. The crowd resisted my attempts to reach the entrance; they weren't giving up their vantage points. I tried to flag the attention of the patrolmen holding back the spectators, but I was just another face in the crowd to him. Then I spotted Dov Gerhart of Homicide West, and yelled at him. Dov ought to remember me, maybe not with pleasure, but he knew me. I shouted his name until he turned and looked in my direction.

"Wait a minute," Dov said, coming toward me. "It's okay, Phil, you can let this one through."

"Thanks," I said. "Listen, Dov—"

But Dov wasn't listening. He turned to look at the open doorway of the building, at the white-coated stretcher bearers bringing out the night's victim. They weren't in a hurry, and it was understandable. The sheet went all the way.

"Dov, listen to me—" I repeated.

The detective grimaced, and said: “Yeah, I’ll be glad to, Ned. He was your pal, wasn’t he? Deepest sympathies.”

“My pal?”

“Tony Eigo.” He turned, and watched them load the ambulance with the corpse. “That’s something, all right. Probably a dozen guys wanted Tony Eigo knocked off, and how does he get it? From a jealous husband.”

“Tony?” I said. “Tony dead?”

“Your ex-client did it,” Dov said grimly. “That guy Rydell. He caught Tony hanging around the building, watching the place. Rydell claims he was after his wife. You know anything about that, Ned?”

“It’s not true,” I said, shaking my head. “He didn’t know the woman, Dov. I swear he didn’t. Rydell was crazy—”

“That’s the word for it, all right. When Tony came into the hallway, Rydell came downstairs and shot him dead. Fired five bullets into him, screaming like a banshee.”

“Where is he?” I said numbly. “Where’s Rydell?”

“Upstairs, answering questions. He won’t get away, not like last time, counselor.” He looked at me, his mouth twisted. “You think he can? Think you can spring him a second time?”

I started up the steps, and Dov put his hand on my arm.

“Wait a minute. Where do you think you’re going?”

“I want to see him, Dov. He’s entitled to talk to a lawyer, isn’t he?”

“You must be nuts yourself. Half a dozen witnesses saw him do it—”

“Can I go up?”

He pushed his hat back from his forehead. “You mean you’ll defend that screwball again? He’s out of his mind, don’t you know that?”

“I know it,” I said. “That’s what I’ll try and prove.”

Dov took his hand off my arm, and I went upstairs to see my client.